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A NOVELETTE.

BY

JOHN STRANGE WINTER.

NEW YORK:
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MIGNON'S HUSBAND.*

CHAPTER I.

THE MISTRESS OF FERRERS'S COURT.

By the fireside there are peace and comfort.
Wives and children, with fair, thoughtful faces,
Waiting, watching,
For a well-known footstep in the passage."

—*The Golden Milestone.*

THERE was a little room opening out of the library at Ferrers's Court which was known in the household as the master's study. An untidy little den it was, but cozy and attractive; not in the least degree like the ordinary country-house study of fiction, which, by the bye, is generally a practical refutation of the assertion "Truth is stranger than fiction."

There were no guns scattered in careless and graceful profusion here and there, for Captain Ferrers—Bootles,

* The author asks the readers of this story to take notice of the fact that in point of age Mignon has made a skip forward of five years during the space of twelve months. This liberty has been taken in order to gratify the wish of a great number of persons in all parts of the world that the matrimonial fate of Bootles's Baby may be decided.

that is—kept his guns in his gun-room, after the manner of most masters of large country-houses. There was no array of hunting-tops, ranging in color from salmon-pink to mahogany, because Bootles had a dressing-room up above wherein those articles reposed upon a shelf in a cupboard until their owner should need them.

There were neither fishing-rods nor tennis-rackets in that little den of Bootles's, because he kept neither the one nor the other under his own eye; but there were one or two newspapers lying about, and a number of the "Field," which had found their way thither from the well-supplied table in the large hall. There was a mighty jar of tobacco, a box of matches, and a large rack over the chimney-shelf containing all sorts and conditions of pipes. Otherwise, except for the smell of tobacco which hung about, the room did not give much the idea of a study at all; rather, indeed, might it have been taken for a nursery, for over the shabby, commodious chairs and sofa were scattered a grand array of toys of all kinds, and in all states of preservation or dilapidation.

Upon the corner of the table, in imminent danger of falling, stood a wonderful performing rabbit; a thing made of white fur, with a red ribbon and a bell about its neck, which moved in a mysterious way on wheels, and jerked its forepaws up and down at regular intervals.

Upon an old oak chest under the window reposed a miniature piano, which played two octaves of white notes without any black ones upon an arrangement of glasses inside the instrument; and a goodly bundle of sticks and one umbrella, which usually stood in a narrow recess near the

door, had been turned out to make a kennel for a large black fur dog, with a bronze nose very much too small for him, above which gleamed out a pair of fierce red eyes such as would better have suited the counterfeit presentment of a game-cock.

There was a headless doll tenderly put to bed in the folds of a faded sofa blanket, and a live puppy patiently gnawing at an India-rubber Jumbo. A huge Angora cat, brindled as a bull-dog, was lying fast asleep coiled up in an arm-chair, and a saucy young kitten of the tabby order was squatting on the arm above, playing peep-bo with the velvet-like ears and dignified ruff of her foreign cousin.

On the other side of the hearth, with her chair drawn well up to the fire, her feet on the fender, and a number of the "Queen" in her hand, sat the mistress of the house, Mrs. Ferrers, awaiting the coming of her lord and master.

She had been a beautiful girl when she had first come as a visitor to Ferrers's Court, but she was a thousand times more beautiful and lovely now, at three-and-thirty, than she had been then. She was larger in person now, and more dignified in bearing; her fair face was more round and less anxious in expression, the wistful look had vanished out of the soft blue-gray eyes, and the once grave lips seemed to be made only for smiles.

And naturally the changed circumstances of her life had also made a great difference to her general air; her gown was of velvet, and fitted like a good glove; her fair hair was dressed by a French maid skilled in every art of making good look better, and better best; diamonds shone at

her ears, diamonds glittered at her throat, and the great half-hoop which Bootles had given her at their betrothal blazed upon her left hand. Well might there be a difference in her since the first time she had come to Ferrers's Court, with never a thought in her mind that she would one day be its mistress! Then she had been as a diamond badly set in pinchbeck gold; now, like the half-hoop upon her wedding-finger, she was set in good gold and points.

She glanced here and there over her paper, and wondered not a little impatiently when her husband was coming. There was a little traveling-clock on the mantel-shelf which pointed hard on the hour of six. Surely he was a long time coming, she thought, as she turned the "Queen" over again.

H'm! The advertisements were all pretty much the same as usual, and Mrs. Ferrers's soft eyes wandered with some disgust over sketches of bald patches and simulated busts, until at last she put the paper down and stirred the fire into a brighter blaze. And then, just as the tiny chime rang out from the ledge above, there was a sound of spurred heels crossing the floor of the library, and he came.

"Halloo, my darling, you here alone!" he cried; then, as she rose, caught her to him and kissed her, as if they had been married but yesterday. "And what have you been doing all day?"

"I've been out and about," she answered, "and the children have been here for an hour with me."

"Yes?" Bootles's tone implied that she might so go on; and in truth he was never tired of hearing about his

children at any time, or, for the matter of that, at any season.

"Madge informed me that it was her 'burfday,' and that she is *two*. And then I asked her how old 'two' was, to which she promptly said, 'Burfday;' so she must have got rather mixed, poor little soul."

"Yes, I suppose so, little angel! By the bye," looking round, "are they coming down again, or are they shut up for the night?"

"Well, I promised them half an hour if you were not *very* late. But, Algy, I wanted to ask you about something before the post goes off to-night. Don't you think, as Mignon is coming home as a finished young lady now, that we ought to bring her out at once? You see, with Major Lucy and so many of the others here, and so many people coming and going, it will be almost the same as being 'out.' And every one has always taken so much notice of her that it will be rather hard to treat her as a child still, and leave her at home when we are going off to balls and so on. What do you think, dearest?"

It was not often that Mrs. Ferrers made such a long speech, for she was anything but a voluble woman. Bootles, who had dropped into a big chair beside hers, and was holding one of her hands, looked at her with admiring eyes.

"What a clear mind you have, child!" he said, in his fondest tones. "And how you seem to grasp a situation all round at once! Now *I* never gave a thought to whether the child was 'out' or not; but, by Jove! after the awful picture you've drawn of her staying at home in desolate-

ness while we go jigging off to balls, it seems to me that the quicker she is 'out' the better. 'Pon my word, it makes me feel quite sad to think how she would feel."

"She is very young, of course," Mrs. Ferrers went on, more as if she was following the thread of her own thoughts than attending to his teasing answer. "And you know, Algy, I should like to keep her young, if I could. It is such a happy time before one knows the world, and"—with a sharp shudder at the remembrance of all that she had suffered by knowing the world too soon —"and—and—yet, she will be safe with you and me, won't she, Algy? It is not like me, who was alone—altogether alone."

Bootles jerked his big chair close up to hers and slipped a scarlet arm about her waist. "Don't think of it, my darling," he said, laying his cheek against hers with an infinite tenderness that was far more touching than a more passionate caress; "that's all over and done with now, and I shall stand between you and harm as long as I am alive. As for the child," he went on, after a pause, "she has always known the world more or less, even from her cradle up. All the same, she hadn't a cradle in my day—what had she in yours? There, darling, don't look so. I didn't mean to hurt you, or even to remind you of—of—anything unpleasant—" and then he broke off short and kissed her again, for he knew that she never could endure the mention of her first husband, Mignon's father.

"So, to continue," he went on presently, "the child is to be presented formally to a world which knows her pretty nearly as well as it knows me; is to be allowed to sit

up till three in the morning and go to Court next season. And I suppose I am to sit down at once and write a thundering big check immediately, eh?"

"No, I don't think I'll trouble you to do that to-night, dear," returned his wife, smiling, "but I think we ought to give some little entertainment ourselves—a dance, or something of that kind, don't you know?"

Bootles burst out laughing. "Why, little woman, what a lot of beating about the bush for a small matter!" he exclaimed. "Why in the world couldn't you say, 'Mignon is coming out this winter, and we must give a ball in honor of the event?' Why couldn't you say that, I should like to know?"

Mrs. Ferrers laughed without replying further, except by saying, softly, "Thank you so much, dear; I *should* like to give a ball next month."

A good many people who knew Mrs. Ferrers said that her way of managing "that dear Bootles" was really admirable; and one Lucy, major of the Scarlet Lancers, was often in the habit of declaring that Mrs. Bootles was out and out the cleverest woman he had ever known. As for Bootles, there was no doubt whatever that (although he was one of the most lavishly generous and least dictatorial men in all the world, never troubling himself to meddle with any domestic matters) he liked being managed in that particular way; but then most men do whose wives try it.

Before either had time to speak again the door burst open, and the children of the house appeared—"blue-eyed banditti," all of them, with their father's buoyant high

spirits and debonair grace of manner, brilliantly fair of complexion, and with the golden curls which are the traditional inheritance of English childhood. They were five in number: Pearl, nearly ten years old, and Maud, nearly eight—tall, well-made, bright girls in sailor frocks, with their long legs in well-girt-up black stockings—then Bertie, the heir, just six, and Cecil, four and a half, counterparts of the girls, without much difference in their general appearance, except that they had trousers instead of kilts. Last of all, Madge, the baby, aged two and a day, or, as Mrs. Humpty-Dumpty, still in charge of the nursery department, had said that morning, "Going on for three now." And Baby Madge was the only one of all that brilliant band who had the least trace of their beautiful mother's softness of feature and mild tenderness of expression; she, too, was the only one who shared with Mignon their mother's ineffable gentleness of disposition.

The four elder Ferrers children were so different—all bright, noisy, boisterous young Turks, full of dash and go; good and kind of heart when you could put aside their sense of the ridiculous, or their insatiable desire for fun of every sort and kind; in fact, they were Bootles over again.

But Baby Madge was a young person of another order—a soft, wee, roundabout, velvet-kitten of a child; appreciative of fun without being boisterous; quiet, without being shy; plucky, without being a romp; and, what put her a shade nearer to her father's heart than her brothers and sisters had ever crept, full to overflowing with sensitive tenderness. Like her mother and like Mignon, her

little heart, ay, and her little body too, seemed at times to be *flooded* with bursts of love for those around her.

"She is the lovingest babe I ever held in my arms," said Mrs. Humpty-Dumpty, before a year had passed over Baby Madge's head; "and she'll be Miss Mignon over again, see if she isn't!"—which had proved true enough.

Bootles turned his head as his youngsters came noisily in at the door, and they, catching sight of the splashed figure in the big chair, uttered a yell of joy and—went for him!

CHAPTER II.

BOOTLES'S CHILDREN.

Oh, little hands! that, weak or strong,
Have still to serve or rule so long,
Have so long to give or ask;
I who so much with book and pen
Have toiled among my fellow-men
Am weary, thinking of your task.

Weariness.

FERRERS'S COURT was full, with the exception of one room—as full as it would hold. The one room was Mignon's—Miss Ferrers, as she was called now. She had never been called by her own name of Mary Gilchrist, but always by that which she had borne in the days when she was a child of uncertainty—Bootles's baby. For one thing, it had been a great blow to Bootles to find that she was Gavor Gilchrist's child, and not willingly would he have called her by the name which always reminded him of the

fact; and for another and perhaps even more forcible reason, his world had grown accustomed to think and speak of her first as Ferrers's Mignon, and then as Mignon Ferrers. Perhaps if Bootles had made a great effort, that world would in time have learned to call her Mary Gilchrist; but as Bootles not only made no such effort, but himself continued to call her Mignon, his world did as it had done aforetime, and called her Mignon Ferrers.

By the bye, if any one had wanted to offend the child herself, he need only have addressed her by one or both of her legal names, when he would have succeeded beyond even his wildest expectations.

And now, after being a year in Paris, Mignon was coming home, no longer Bootles's baby, but a finished young lady about to be introduced into that wicked world which, as Bootles was careful to explain, she had known from her cradle up.

At the Court all was fuss and excitement. The servants, who worshiped her, had each and all some trifling service to do for her by which they could show their joy at her return from what they all regarded as a year of cruel exile. The children were wild with expectation and delight at the prospect of having her among them again, and there was so much that they had to do for her that for a whole week before the day of her return they did the self-same things over and over again, so that there might be nothing wanting when she came. First, then, was the old stable cat which poor young Houp-La had left as a precious dying gift to "little missie." She was a very old cat now, but sleek and handsome still in spite of her years. She had

always kept to the stable, having been brought up that way, and lived in a loose box with a pony which Major Lucy had given to Mignon five years before.

The pony was still Mignon's, though Pearl had ridden him these three years, and Pearl's chief anxiety was that "Jock" should appear before his mistress with what might be called "a shining morning face." Consequently, for several days the life of the young groom who had that pony under his charge was made a complete burden to him, or, to be quite correct, it would have been so had the grand result which Miss Pearl desired not been for the pleasure of Miss Mignon; for, let me tell you, that while in the house Mignon had come to be known as "Miss Ferrers," the stable still kept obstinately to their old form of address, and persisted in calling her "Miss Mignon."

Then there was a great fuss with the St. Bernard, also a gift of Major Lucy's to Mignon. He, like poor little Houp-La's cat, was not so young as he had been once; in fact he was nearly fourteen years old—a good age for a dog—and did not care to go roaming about the gardens and shrubberies of the Court as he had been used to do, but spent most of his time basking before the great wood fire in the hall, thinking not of the snow-topped mountains of Switzerland—for he had been born in Blankhampton Barracks, and therefore had never seen the country which was his parents' native land—but thinking of—well, it would be hard to say, perhaps of his absent mistress. Hugo was Maud's especial care, and she was at her wit's end to know how to do anything to give the old fellow a festive air in honor of Mignon's return.

But at last she hit upon a plan by which the old dog's appearance might, she thought, be improved. How if he were washed?

So Miss Maud went mysteriously off to the stables and had a consultation with Terry—now, as he had been in Captain Ferrers's service days, a great person in that department.

"I want Terry," she said to the first lad whom she saw in the yard.

"Yes, miss. Mr. Terry's in the saddle-room, miss," the lad answered, with a grin and a touch of his forelock.

So Miss Maud pursued her favorite Terry into the sacred recesses of the saddle-room, where, if the truth be told, he was composing a letter to his sweetheart; for Terry still kept on the old game, and "kept company" with any smart young woman who took his fancy, though he seemed as far off getting married as ever.

But Maud was his favorite of all the young Ferrerses, and went boldly in without any fear of finding herself snubbed when she got there. "Terry, are you there?" she demanded, as she pushed the door open.

Terry got up from his desk. "Yes, Miss Maud," he answered. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, now, look here, Terry," she began, in her most coaxing and confidential tones; then, as she caught sight of the letter on the pad of blotting-paper, broke off short —"Is that a letter, Terry?"

"Yes, miss, it is," answered Terry, rather sheepishly.

"H'm—who is it to?" was the unexpected demand.

Now Terry was possessed of the true soldier's respect for

rank, which was one and indeed the chief reason that Bootles allowed his little daughters to go freely about the stables, as Mignon had done before them, and he blushed under the calm and searching gaze of the child's steady blue eyes as if he had been caught doing something wrong.

"It's—it's—to a friend of mine," he stammered at last.

Maud looked very much interested. "And what's his name, Terry?" she inquired.

"It—it—it isn't a him," blurted out Terry at last, turning from a quite commonplace blush to a vivid guilty scarlet.

"Why, Terry, how red your face is!" observed Miss Maud. "You've been sitting too near the fire. Don't you know that's very bad for you? You might go blind."

Thankful in the extreme for this change in the conversation, Terry sidled away from the desk and began stirring up the already blazing fire into a still more fierce blaze. "I shouldn't like that, miss," he said, referring to her solemn warning.

"Humphie says," Maud went on, happily forgetting the letter altogether, "that a woman once did go blind just from sitting blinking over a book in the fire-light without having the gas lighted."

"Humphie knows some queer tales," said Terry, satirically; "but it's bad to roast your eyes out at the fire, miss, and she's right enough there. But what can I do for you this morning, missie?"

"Well, Terry," said the child, thus recalled to a re-

membrance of her errand, "you know that Mignon is coming home on Wednesday."

"Miss Mignon is coming home on Wednesday," repeated Terry. "Yes, missie, I know that."

"And old Hugo, somehow, has got to look dreadfully ragged and grisly, don't you think?"

"Yes, the old dog's getting a good age now, you know, missie."

"But if he were cleaned up, don't you think he'd look better, hey, Terry? Couldn't you set some of the boys to give him a good washing?"

Terry looked more than doubtful. "I *could*, of course, missie," he answered; "but the weather is hard just now, and the old fellow suffers a good bit from rheumatics as it is. And if we go giving him cold, we shall have him a-howling all over the place like a mad thing. I doubt it wouldn't do to go washing of him this weather, missie."

Maud's bright face fell visibly. "Oh, Terry, he *is* so dirty!" she cried. "Can't you do *any*thing with him?"

"If you can coax him out into the yard, two of the lads might put a muzzle on him and give him a good grooming down," Terry suggested. "We could do that for you, missie."

"He would look better for it, wouldn't he?"

"Well, he wouldn't look any worse," was Terry's consoling reply.

Eventually they decided that it should be done, and it became old Hugo's fate to be dragged out every morning to undergo an hour of torture at the hands of a couple of stable-boys, who, under Terry's vigilant eye, did not at-

tempt to shirk the task of improving his personal appearance, to the intense satisfaction of his young guardian, if not to his own sense of ease and comfort.

And at last the day of Mignon's return came, a clear, bright, winter day, with snow lying some inches deep upon the ground, and ice almost fit for skating, covering the lake.

"They will be here to-day," were the first words each of the children uttered to their mother.

"Yes, they will be here to-day," returned Mrs. Ferrers, who, having been parted a whole year from Mignon and a whole week from Bootles, was almost as excited as they were.

"Mother, we may go with you to the station?" asked Pearl.

"For you are going to the station?" inquired Maud.

"I want to go," put in young Cecil, in a shrill pipe.

"I *am* going," asserted Bertie, in a lordly tone.

"My dears, you can not any of you go with me," Mrs. Ferrers replied, decidedly. "I must go in the open carriage myself, and Major Lucy is going with me."

Four blank faces turned toward her instantly.

"But, mother—" began Maud.

"I promised—" burst out Pearl.

"*I* shall go on the box," declared Bertie, calmly.

"You will do nothing of the sort," returned his mother, as sharply as it was in her to speak to any one. "If you had listened for a moment you would have heard what I was going to say you might do."

The elder ones made a rush for her at once. "We

didn't mean to be *cross*, mother," said Pearl, with a certain air of dignity.

"Did we *sound* cross?" asked Maud, blankly.

"I *was* cross," cried Bertie; "but I love you, mother dear, and we *do* want to go so very badly, you can't think."

"Oh, yes. I can think very well; and you shall go to meet Mignon, though not with me. You can go with fräulein in the break, and can bring back the luggage. There, will that satisfy you?"

"Oh, mother, it will be lovely!" cried Pearl; and the others echoed, "Lovely—lovely—lovely!"

CHAPTER III.

MIGNON.

Blue were her eyes as the fairy flax,
Her cheeks like the dawn of day,
And her bosom white as the hawthorn buds
That open in the month of May.

The Wreck of the Hesperus.

THERE was quite a crowd at the little country station waiting for the train which was to bring Mignon home.

It was the same little station where Bootles had parted almost in silence, and in pain and misery too great for words, from Mignon's mother, never daring to dream that one day she would wait upon its little graveled platform for her husband—for him! It was all very much the same as it had been then, that is, so far as the station was concerned. With her, thank Heaven, life had come to be ut-

terly different to what life had been for her in those bygone, painful days. There was a snug and bright little office wherein the few passengers were invited to wait if the day happened to be cold, for Eccles Station did not boast itself in the glory of a waiting-room. And there beside the fire, with Baby Madge upon her knee, sat Mrs. Ferrers, her sweet and lovely face shining out fair and placid against the masses of velvet and rich furs in which she was wrapped; and to say the least, Mrs. Ferrers was anxious! True, well might she be that; for the four young Ferrerses were here, there, and everywhere, and it is no exaggeration to say that she would not have been surprised at any moment if the mangled remains of one or all of them had been brought in and laid upon the floor at her feet.

In vain, when one or other of them bounced in with a —"Mother, the train's awfully late—that arm-thing hasn't gone down *yet*"—did she urge that they must all be very cold, and that they had better come and sit down by the fire.

"Dearest mother," said Pearl, "we are as warm as toast—in fact we are all *hot*. Bertie wanted to take his coat off, only fräulein wouldn't let him. And Major Lucy is going with us to see Mr. Callum's puppies—six of them, only a week old. Mr. Callum says we can have one if we like—I suppose we can?"

"Oh, yes; but you are sure, Pearl, that you're not cold?" answered Mrs. Ferrers, shivering in her furs, and in spite of the roaring fire made in her honor.

"We are *boiling*, mother," returned Pearl, with emphasis, then went off again.

"I wonder if Major Lucy and fräulein will be able to keep them out of harm's way," she said, anxiously, to the station-master, who came in just then.

"Why, yes, mem," he replied—Mr. Callum, by the bye, was a Scotchman—"the young leddies have gone round to the back to see the wee puppies. I made a suggaastion to them that the wee bit things were at the hoose, for I thocht they'd be out of danger there."

"Oh! that is all right," cried Mrs. Ferrers, in great relief. "Thank you so much, Mr. Callum. I get nervous about a railway, for children are so active and so daring, one never knows one minute what they will do the next."

"The train is running in, mem," said the station-master, after a glance out of the window.

And sure enough, a moment later the train glided alongside the platform, and Mrs. Ferrers, with Baby Madge still in her arms, sprung to her feet and ran out of the office.

At the same moment the four youngsters came tearing round the corner from the station-master's pretty ivy-wreathed house, and made a rush for the new-comers.

In their extravagant and demonstrative joy they would almost have torn Mignon to pieces, only they happened to come across their father first, so that he fell the first victim to their soft embraces. This gave Mrs. Ferrers a chance of speaking to the heroine of the day, of hugging her warmly to her breast, of gazing at her with fond and adoring eyes.

"She has grown quite a woman, Major Lucy," she cried

holding her a little away from her that she might see her better.

"Almost—" said Lucy. He had been on the point of saying, "Almost old enough to be married," but somehow the old joke died upon his lips before it was uttered, perhaps because of a certain shyness—which was utterly new to all of them—in the frank blue eyes, and a sudden deepening of the soft bloom upon her cheeks.

But it was not until they had reached the Court, and Mignon had been upstairs and changed her traveling-dress for a loose tea-gown arrangement of soft, yellowish silk, and of a very Frenchified appearance, that Lucy was left for a moment with her alone.

He was waiting for the appearance of the ladies in the great hall, where afternoon tea was always served; the pretty red and gold tray, with its handsome Queen Anne silver and old Crown Derby china, was all set ready, the silver kettle was hissing and spluttering—well, yes, of course, I mean that the water inside it was doing so—and a servant had, an instant before, brought in a couple of covered plates. Then Mignon came in in her softly trailing garments and crossed the large hall to the hearth beside him. If the truth be told, it gave Lucy quite a start to see how completely every trace of the child had gone.

"My old friend is quite grown up a young lady," he said, with a half-regretful air, as she spread out her pretty dimpled hands to the warmth of the fire.

Mignon nodded, and with the nod the child Mignon seemed to come back again.

"Yes, I think I am quite grown up now, Lal," she said,

smiling; "but I don't know that I'm any worse for that. What do you think?"

He captured the hand nearest to him and looked at it; it was a pretty little hand, slender and yet not thin, pink-palmed and soft as satin.

"Yes, it is quite a grown-up hand," he answered; and then some of the others came in, and they were no longer alone.

But although Mignon was quite a grown up young lady now, the first little air of strangeness soon wore off, and before the tea-tray was sent away Lucy felt as if the child Mignon, who had always loved Bootles and himself so tenderly, had come back again, notwithstanding the fact that her pretty, fair head was as high as his chin now, and that the pretty feet and ankles which he had been used to see were now hidden away behind yards and yards of soft, yellowish silken stuff, which might be very, very fashionable, even artistic, but which got under his feet, and would probably have made him swear if he had not been blessed with the temper of an angel.

I have said that the Court was full of visitors; consequently, a fairly large party had turned up for that meal which is generally considered to be loved of the fair sex only, and which in the day's doings takes very much the place that the extra dances do in a ball programme. Nearly all the ladies were there and six or seven men—among them, besides Bootles and Lucy, a tall, dark-haired lad of one-and-twenty, who had been in the Scarlet Lancers a year and a half, but had never, though he had heard a good deal about her, seen Mignon before.

"Darkey," said Bootles—suddenly addressing him, and using the pleasant, familiar name by which he went among the officers of his regiment in preference to his own more distinguished one of St. John Stanley—"give us a song; there's a good chap."

Thus bidden, young Jack Stanley moved to the other side of the large hall, where a little piano in a neat black and gold case stood in a recess, and sat himself down upon the old oak bench which did duty for a music-stool.

He struck a few strong chords and dashed at once into his latest song. It was a good song, of a comic order, and his hearers all joined in the chorus excepting Mignon, who for a year past had been out of the way of joys of this kind, and did not recover her old self sufficiently to join in with the other voices until two verses had been sung.

"Johnnie, will you wait for awhile?
Johnnie, will you wait for awhile?
Come along, John,
With your big boots on,
Or—
Johnnie, will you wait for awhile?

Mignon, who had been standing near the fire when Darkey Stanley began to sing, crept nearer and nearer to his side of the hall, finally halting about a couple of yards behind him, listening intently.

A pretty picture she made as she stood, tall and slender as a young lily or a bonny daffodil, her soft, yellow draperies lying on the dark carpet, and her pretty golden head moving to and fro in harmony with the song which told the tale of Johnnie's misfortunes.

"Something like a song, that," murmured Lucy in her ear as the last stirring chorus ceased. Lucy was not musical, and said sometimes that songs of this description had the advantage of never going beyond his powers of comprehension.

"Yes, isn't it good?" Mignon answered. "I've been singing songs of a different kind lately, Lal. I wonder if you would like them? I'll try one of these fine days. But tell me, who is he?" nodding her head toward Stanley, who was preparing to go on with another song, which he gave with a good, steady, hearty uniformity of volume from beginning to end.

"St. John Stanley, of the Scarlet Lancers; the fellows generally call him 'Darkey'—he's got such a top-knot, don't you know?"

"It is a top-knot," returned Mignon, with a laugh, glancing at the thick crop of curly dark hair on the crown of young Stanley's head; "but a very nice top-knot, Lal, don't you think?"

"Oh, awfully nice!" returned Lucy, in so unsympathetic a tone that Mignon's big eyes opened wide, and she wondered if he wasn't quite well, or perhaps what she had heard a man say to another on the platform of the London station that morning, "a bit chippy."

"I say, Lal," she asked, suddenly, "what is it to feel 'a bit chippy'?"

Lucy burst out laughing. "Good heavens, child! where did you pick that up?" he demanded. "Oh! on the platform at Victoria. Well, it means seedy; you'd better not

go telling any one you feel 'a bit chippy'—they mightn't understand it."

"I didn't know. Only I'd never heard Bootles or you say it, and I wanted to know," Mignon said, smiling up at him. "I thought it might mean out of sorts in your temper; but of course if it's your body it wouldn't be applicable."

Lucy took the hint instantly. "Mignon, my sweetheart," he murmured, his voice going back into the infinite tenderness of her child days, "was my temper out of sorts? Did it sound so? What a bwrute I am!—and on your wewry first day at home too."

"Never mind, Lal dear; perhaps you didn't mean it," said Mignon, with a burst of magnanimity such as made Lucy feel that the elegant young lady in the gorgeous tea-gown had altogether gone, and that the loving, brave-hearted, and big-souled child Mignon had come to him again.

"I never want to say or look anything that will hurt you, my sweetheart," he returned, in his softest voice and with his gentlest air.

So it was bridged over—the first little rift within the hitherto perfect lute of their friendship; and Mignon went off with her mother to make some additions to her toilet, as happy and gay as she had ever been in her life.

Ay, but the little rift was still there!

She dropped her pretty lace-bordered handkerchief as she crossed the hall, and young Stanley ran after her to restore it. She took it with a smile and a radiant glance, and so they stood for an instant, the blue eyes looking up under

their long fringes straight into the bold brown ones, which were full to the brim and running over with unutterable adoration.

It was a pretty picture, and more than one person in the hall thought so. The tall and slender girl in the dainty Old-world costume—as unlike the two smart sisters in their well-built Redfern gowns, thick-soled boots, and hard felt hats, who had just come in from a country tramp, as well could be—and the big stalwart young fellow in the first flush and glory of his manhood; but one Cecil Lucy, Major of the Scarlet Lancers, turned away from it with disgust in his eyes and an ugly word upon his lips.

"That cursed French school has made a finished coquette of her," he said in his heart, and gave a great sigh for the sweet, fresh, fearless simplicity of the days that were no more.

All the same, he was wrong! Coquetry was the very last thing which had been taught Mignon at her French school. He forgot that though she was still a child to him and some others, to herself and to the world, particularly that portion of it which had its dwelling-place within the bosom of St. John Stanley, she was a fascinating young lady in the first bloom and blush of her beauty.

"She is a woman now, with the heart and hopes of a woman."

Ay, but Lucy had forgotten that, and so he turned his back upon the pretty picture, and called her a coquette because Dame Nature had made her fair.

So like us that! Women can be more just.

A child, indeed! If at that moment he could have

looked into young St. John Stanley's heart, he would have found there a state of feelings such as would have justified an adaptation from lines written by the immortal bard three hundred years ago:

"She is a woman, therefore may be woo'd;
She is a woman, therefore may be won;
She is *Mignon*, therefore must be loved!"

CHAPTER IV.

MIGNON'S SWEETHEART.

Loving she is, and tractable, though wild;
And innocence hath privilege in her
To dignify arch looks and laughing eyes.

WORDSWORTH.

It is the little rift within the lover's lute
That, by and by, will make the music mute,
And, ever widening, slowly silence all.

The little rift within the lover's lute,
Or pitted speck in garner'd fruit,
That, rolling inward, slowly molders all.

TENNYSON.

IT was with a pang that Lucy saw, when he came down into the hall half an hour later, that the pretty picture of coquetry had ripened into a still prettier one of warm friendship; for Mignon and young Stanley were sitting very close together at the great table of carved black oak which occupied the center of that princely apartment, and was littered with the newspapers of the day. He could not at

first see what they were doing, but their heads seemed very near to each other, far nearer than the length of their acquaintance warranted, and they had the lamp drawn as close to them as could be.

"Take care!" he heard Mignon say, in a suppressed tone; then she drew up her breath in a sharp, hissing sound: "Ah! but that did hurt."

"Let me try again, Miss Ferrers," pleaded the lad, in evident distress.

But Mignon shook her head. "No, thanks; you're rather a bad hand at taking splinters out." (She had been on the point of saying, "You're an awful duffer at taking splinters out," but nipped the words off the end of her tongue just in time.) "I'll wait till Major Lucy comes down."

"I wish you'd—" began the boy.

"But I won't," retorted Mignon, quickly. "Let us look at 'Punch.'"

He stretched out a hand and got the "Punch" from the other side of the table, and they settled down to enjoy it. Lucy noticed that the curly brown head still kept a great deal nearer to the golden one than was necessary; nor did the golden one seem in any way anxious to increase the distance between them. In short, Mignon had not been brought up to be a prude, and had been the cherished friend of too many a gallant soldier from her cradle up to be afraid of one now. Perhaps, in that respect, Lucy would have preferred that she should be "quite grown up a young lady."

After a moment or so he dropped the heavy velvet

portière behind him and went across the hall to the fireplace. Mignon jumped up as soon as she perceived him.

"Oh, Lal! I've run a great ugly splinter into my hand," she cried, dolefully. "Mr. Stanley has been trying to get it out, and—ugh! nearly hacked my finger to bits."

"Miss Ferrers!" burst out Stanley, with a fine show of indignation.

"I told him I'd wait till you came," she went on, addressing Lucy. "Don't hurt me," she added, imperatively.

"Did I ever hurt you?" demanded Lucy.

"No, but he did," nodding with a laugh at Stanley; then sung with a quick adaptation of his song,

> "'The old splinter sat as on a stile,
> Saying, "Come along, Johnnie, will you hook me now?
> Or—Johnnie, will you wait for awhile?"'

And Johnnie waited," she ended, mischievously.

"What!—is it out? What joy! You're certainly A1 at taking splinters out of one's fingers."

"The major has had more practice at that sort of thing than I," put in Stanley, who was a little nettled at his failure, and more than nettled to think that the major should succeed without an effort where he had ignominiously failed after half a dozen attempts.

"Ah, I dare say," rejoined Mignon, who heard nothing at all caustic in the words; "he has taken dozens of splinters out of my hands, in fact, I may say hundreds."

By that time the different guests began to appear, the

two girls with the thick-soled boots and Redfern gowns among them. The little group of three broke up then and the two girls appropriated Mignon unto themselves.

"Are they wearing these things in Paris, Mignon?" they demanded, or rather one of them did.

Mignon laughed. "I believe so; it came in my outfit," she answered.

"It's awfully pretty," remarked the other one, critically, "and would be useful too, don't you think, Sophy?"

"I don't know, Jane. We should *feel* queer in them after our Redfern frocks, don't you think?"

"Oh, I, too, am getting rigged out by Redfern," put in Mignon, hastily—"only you can't wear him in the evening."

"Oh, yes, you can. These are Redfern gowns," said Sophy, with a superior simper a-down herself.

"But a tea-gown wouldn't feel particularly queer after that," objected Mignon, looking at the pretty evening dress, with its low bodice and absence of sleeves.

"We should feel smothered—hemmed in—choked," declared Jane Carmine, solemnly. "Still, if one could get used to them, I've no doubt they would be very useful."

"Very useful, when you happen to leave your luggage at a station, to be fetched by a cart which somebody forgets to order," Mignon laughed. "To tell you the truth, I am wearing it to-night because, like a donkey, I left my keys in my bedroom at Hill Street, and the box which had my linen and such things in, with this on the top, was the only one we could get open. I assure you I am not going to spend the rest of my life in tea-gowns."

"Heaven forbid!" murmured Lucy, who had been accustomed to hunting and shooting, fishing and riding and driving with her ever since the time she had been old enough to sit a pony, to say nothing of such minor and trifling pursuits as skating and tennis, and so on.

"Did you hear what Madge said to me when Pearl and Maud brought her into my room? No? Oh, it was so funny! She looked at me for a long time, and then she burst out, 'Little mum-ma, tiss Match!' I couldn't think what she meant for a minute. 'Tiss Match!' she kept saying; 'tiss Match!' I looked all round, but Pearl and Maud were very busy 'making up' with my Jewsbury tooth-paste and a powder-box, and were not attending to us at all. 'What *is* Match, my angel?' I said; whereupon the little mite gave a jump on her little feet and put her outspread hands over her small bosom. 'Here tee is!' she cried; and I felt such a fool not to have understood her."

"She's a jolly little soul!" put in Stanley. "The major says she's very like what you were at that age, Miss Ferrers."

"Yes, I believe so; mother and Bootles always say the same."

Lucy turned on his heel and left the group. As a matter of fact, he would like to have just throttled that young gentleman as he stood; for, positively, it seemed as if he could not speak without in some way pointing out that Lucy was of an older generation than Mignon and himself. "Young bwrute!" said Lucy to himself; "he has the advantage there, and knows how to use it."

It was very unpleasant, and all very different from what

had been only a year before. Then he had always called Mignon his sweetheart, and had openly declared that as soon as she was old enough they were going to be married. Now it was different. He was pointedly put in his place as an old fogy—and, by the bye, he was but six-and-thirty—and expected to feel that Mignon was no longer, by any special interest, his, except in the same way, perhaps, that she belonged to Bootles. It was hard lines, and Lucy didn't relish the position.

It wasn't so much that he wanted to marry Mignon—certainly not without giving her time to think it well out—or that he was not willing to give her up to some other fellow right willingly and gracefully, if it seemed for her happiness that he should do so. It wasn't— But there, truth to tell, Lucy didn't quite know what it was, only he hated young St. John Stanley—"that darkey," he called him in his own mind—at that moment as he had not felt it in him to hate any one for years: "An empty-headed, swaggering young devil, that hasn't half mastered his work yet."

And, worst of all, Mignon was smiling upon his wooing with friendly eyes, and actually seemed to like the young cub, and to find him amusing!

What a queer world this is!

It is doubtful if Lucy had been so thoroughly put out and irritable for years past as he was on that first evening which Mignon spent at home after her sojourn in Paris. And to add to his miseries, Jane Carmine, who was five-and-twenty, and called herself "a *little* older than Mignon," had apparently satisfied herself that the handsome,

smooth-tongued major was worthy of her attention, and went in for him with the frank, unblushing zeal of a girl not yet out of the school-room, or of a lady of a certain age, at what old-fashioned folk call "her last prayers."

Jane Carmine was a pretty-looking girl enough, much prettier than her sister Sophy (who was more angular in shape, and suffered from white eyelashes), with blue eyes of a pretty color, if somewhat shallow, a little pert nose, and a short-lipped mouth, always a trifle open; there was a certain difficulty of the lips to quite close over the teeth, which spoiled what would otherwise have been a really pretty and piquant little face.

But Lucy did not like or admire that type of feminine beauty; and, truth to tell, before that evening was over he was unutterably miserable, even abject. He tried so hard to get away from Jane Carmine. Once he took refuge under Mrs. Bootles's wing, but somebody — some fiend, Lucy said—suggested Dumb Crambo, and he was hauled away into the morning-room to await the choice of those in possession of the hall, and there he found himself leaning up against the wall, with Jane Carmine at his elbow.

Jane Carmine did her best, but her efforts were all thrown away upon him; and the Redfern frock, which was lovely, might have been a sack, for any pleasure it gave the obdurate Lucy. He only shut his eyes as he leaned the back of his head against the wall, and said to himself, in a kind of prayer, "How long?—how long?"

After a short delay, Stanley came to the door and informed the assembled company that they had chosen a word to rhyme with jog.

"Jog," said a leading spirit. "Oh, it must be dog. Let's all go in on all-fours and bark."

"But it's Dumb Crambo," objected another. "Barking ain't allowed."

"Then we'll sniff," said the leading spirit, in a tone that allowed of no further objections being put forward.

Thereupon, to Lucy's profound disgust, down they all had to go upon hands and knees, and to jump, creep, bound, scramble into the large hall as best they could; and he had his best evening clothes on too, a new suit that had just come from town, made of dull twill with silk facings! He had put them on in honor of Mignon, and had the satisfaction of spoiling them for the gratification of Jane Carmine!

She, poor misguided thing, was just in front of him, ruining a good Redfern gown with a cheerful countenance, that he might see what a lively little kitten she was! But what did her sacrifice avail with him? Simply naught. He never even cast so much as a glance at her kittenish sportiveness; for as soon as his head got through the door his eyes went in search of Mignon. And Mignon was sitting on a little couch with Darkey, watching with laughing eyes the entry of the performers.

As for Darkey, he was armed with a big palm-leaf fan, and was fanning Mignon vigorously; but he broke off that occupation to hiss with equal energy, and shout, "Not hog—not hog! Hiss—ss—ss!"

Lucy got up and stalked out. It wasn't pleasant to be taken for a hog! He didn't like it.

CHAPTER V.

JANE CARMINE.

The worst fault you have is to be in love.

As You Like It.

There never was a little woman so full of hope, tenderness, and love and anxiety as this little woman.—DICKENS.

LUCY was so truly miserable at the new turn which events had taken that he seriously began to think of cutting his visit to Ferrers's Court short.

Still he had spent so many long leaves with Bootles and his wife that it really required more moral courage than Jane Carmine had left him possessed of to propose a move just then, and still more to face the outcry which would inevitably follow such a proposal.

"Besides, what can I tell Bootles?" he asked himself, dolefully, as he settled his white tie before the dressing-glass. "If I give out important business—lawyer's letter, and all that—why, Bootles 'll just say, 'Let's have a look at it, old chap;' and make up lies without pwremeditation is—er—what I nev-ah could do! But what the devil am I to do? If I stop here long, that Jane Carmine will marwry me to a dead certainty. I shouldn't like to marwry Jane Carmine, I must say. 'Pon my soul, it's dayvilish hard. There's that gwreat bwurte Landover actually in love with her, and she wants *me!* Always the way with

those wolf-mouthed women—they've got such a devil of a nose for the best."

There was not the smallest shade of conceit about Lucy when he spoke of himself as the best in comparison with Jane Carmine's admirer, Mr. Landover.

True, Mr. Geoffrey Landover was in every way "a catch," and a far richer man than Lucy would ever be—

> "A raiser of huge melons and of pines;
> A patron of some thirty charities."

But for all his broad lands, and his great houses, and his princely income, he was not what would attract a girl who could be attracted by Lucy's smooth, silky voice, and Lucy's smoother, silkier manners. There was a something boisterous and rough about him—blatant, Lucy called it—as if he had brought his "Tally-ho" into the drawing-room, and imagined that there were three turnip-fields between himself and the other side of the whist-table.

And not only was he blatant and boisterous, he was also a bore! He *would* carry on all his conversation in the possessive case—"*my* hounds, *my* houses, *my* farms, *my* tenants—*my*—*my*—*my evewry*thing," Lucy burst out, irritably, then confided to his double in the looking-glass that he hated a fellow who couldn't leave himself and his belongings out of his conversation for five minutes together.

And then he would persist in going into details of pedigree such as are not very polite in a drawing-room, and he *would* call his hounds by generic names—and altogether Lucy very often longed to kick him!

Squire Landover had cast an admiring eye at Jane Carmine—"a clever little chestnut filly," he called her—the first night of her stay at Ferrers's Court, when she and the other ladies had trooped off to bed, and he had gone with the men into the smoking-room to have a last pipe ere he set out on his nine miles drive to Landover Castle.

He came again and again to Ferrers's Court, and shouted his compliments at her as if she were ninety, and very deaf for her age; but his suit did not prosper, for Jane had set her fancy on Lucy, and nobody had taken the trouble to tell her what a real prize Geoffrey Landover was—that is to say, from a matrimonial point of view.

So Jane did not help him in the least. She kept all her little arts and graces for Lucy, and mercilessly snubbed the big fox-hunting squire whenever he came near her, which perhaps had not a little to do with that gentleman's having succumbed to her attractions.

Lucy heard the dinner-bell ring with a groan, and went leisurely down-stairs, hoping that by the time he got to the drawing-room Jane Carmine would have been disposed of, and sent in to dinner with somebody; in fact, in the fullness of his misery he had confided to Mrs. Bootles that he did not like always to take the same lady in to dinner.

"It's such a bore for a lady; and however bored she may be, she can't vewry well say so," he explained, with an elaborate courtesy which would not allow him to say anything slighting of a lady, or of one of his hostess's guests, and Mrs. Bootles promised to effect a change. He thought he was tolerably safe for that one night, at all events, and if he had extra good-luck Mrs. Bootles might

tell him to take in Mignon! But, alas! in this world our little plans and arrangements do not always fall as we wish them to do, and no sooner had Lucy safely run the gantlet of the corridor on to which his bedroom opened, and fairly committed himself to the perilous publicity of the gallery, than he came full upon Jane Carmine, who was standing looking over the railing into the hall below. She gave a start when she saw him.

"Oh, Major Lucy," she said, in a piteous little scrap of a voice, "I'm so awfully late for dinner! I've never been late before."

"Oh, no, it's not so vewry late, Miss Jane," said he, raging in his heart that he had not had sense enough to be early.

"I was afraid to go down," she went on.

"Oh, come along; there's nothing to be afwraid of," he answered, moving toward the stairs.

Jane Carmine moved that way too. "I'm not so frightened *now*," she said, with a kittenish little air. "*You*'ll take care of me, won't you?"

"Oh, yes, as far as you need it, Miss Jane," Lucy returned, with a grim feeling of amusement, as he remembered that as soon as they got into the drawing-room Mrs. Bootles would provide somebody else to fulfill that pleasant office.

But she was one too many for him. She ran up to Mrs. Bootles, who was just sending her first guests in to dinner as they reached the door, and said, "Don't disturb yourself, dear Mrs. Ferrers. I'm awfully sorry to be so late,

but Major Lucy is going to take care of me;" and, as Lucy's delicately expressed fears that morning had been all for the lady's comfort, Mrs. Bootles thought it was all right, and did not further disturb herself about them.

"I thought it very odd if Jane Carmine or any other girl had got tired of him," she said to herself as she crossed the hall.

And it never occurred to her that Lucy might have got tired of Jane Carmine!

Happily, however, Lucy's misery was somewhat mitigated by the fact that Geoffrey Landover had come to dinner, and that he had contrived to wait until Jane Carmine was seated, and had then unceremoniously made for the seat next to hers, leaving his lawful charge to shift for herself; which she did with a very sad expression of her face, and thought she had never in all her life gone in to dinner with such a brute before!

Miss Jane saw the little maneuver, and snubbed the burly squire as severely as she knew how; but it was all of no use. Geoffrey Landover had got his innings, and meant to make the most of them. So during the whole of the meal he insisted on monopolizing her attention—enforcing his remarks, if she did not take sufficient heed to them, with a vigorous application of his substantial elbow.

"I say"—with a nudge—"Miss Carmine—at least, Miss Jane, I may say, mayn't I?—I say, I wish you'd get Mrs. Ferrers to bring you over to my place some day this week."

Jane Carmine turned from uttering a soft whisper into Lucy's ear, who in his turn was watching with a grim feel-

ing of misery a similar process between young Stanley and Mignon with an elaborate air of attention.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Landover. You were saying—"

"I was saying I wished you would get Mrs. Ferrers to bring you over to my place soon. Awf'ly jolly place. I should like to show you over it."

"Really! Is it new?"

It is not exaggeration to say that Geoffrey Landover nearly choked. To be asked in cold blood by a girl to whom he had been paying marked attention for several days, almost two weeks, if Landover Castle was *new!*

"Has Mrs. Ferrers never told you anything about my place?" he demanded.

"Not a word," returned Jane, shaking her head, with a blank expression of face such as showed she was speaking the truth, and nothing but the truth.

Squire Landover stared at her for a moment, and then he blurted out, "God bless my soul!"

"But why?" asked Jane Carmine, who was only bent on snubbing him, and being left in peace to have a good time with Lucy, and so was not even amused by his intense surprise. "Is it a show-place? What is it called?"

"You must see it," returned Mr. Landover, with an air of dignity such as sat upon him as ill as a silken gown does upon a dairy-maid.

At this point Lucy, who had overheard the last few sentences, thought he saw a loop-hole of escape for himself, and forthwith put in his word.

"Why—er—Landover Castle is one of the finest—er—

places in England, Miss Jane. You must have heard of it."

Miss Jane shook her head with a fine air of innocent indifference.

"It's—it's—er—quite palatial," Lucy said, bringing out the biggest word he could think of on the spur of the moment.

"You must talk to Mrs. Ferrers about it," said Jane, rather more graciously, to the owner of Landover Castle; then turned round to Lucy, and murmured, with an upward look such as made his flesh creep, and in a tender and sentimental tone, "Between ourselves, show-places and palatial mansions are not much in my line; there's nothing homely and livable about them." And then she added, in a lower tone still, "*I* like roughing it."

As I said, Lucy's flesh fairly crept with the intensity of his unutterable disgust; but he turned his handsome eyes upon her with a serene gaze which was truly admirable.

"Wroughing it is all vewry well in the abstwract, Miss Jane; and when you've got heaps and heaps of money it may be made fairly comfortable, if you've got a vewry contented mind and are fond of change. But—er—believe me, the palatial mansion would suit you far better than the wrough-and-wready cottage style of thing, don't you know?"

"There's something very sweet about love in a cottage," sighed Jane Carmine, softly.

Lucy shuddered. "Yes; but there's something vewry substantial about the palatial mansion," he returned, promptly, swallowing his disgust bravely. "Now, there's

a good deal of glamour about what is commonly called 'following the dwrum;' in fact, I may say it's all glamour, and the glamour is the best part of it all."

"It must be lovely," murmured Jane.

"Yes, it is! It's lovely to live in poky quarters in barwracks, with evewrything on the scale of an artisan's dwelling; and it's lovely to have furniture that all takes to pieces, and makes the place look like an artisan's parlor when it's put together; and it's lovely for a lady to have spells when she can't get a servant for love or money, and has no one but a gwreat bwrute of a dwragoon to do up her quarters for her, or pewrhaps a wretched woman fwrom the wranks, who takes evewry opportunity of telling her that the 'worse barwracks at Haounslaow are far better nor these,' and so on. Yes, it's all vewry lovely till you twry it, Miss Jane."

"One might have a furnished house at each place," suggested Jane, feeling all at once as if the ideal was slipping away from her grasp.

"Yes, but you need the palatial income for that," answered Lucy, quickly. "Not a poor beggah that hasn't got two sixpences to wrub together."

His manner added, quite as plainly as words could have done, "a poor beg-gah *like me*," and Jane felt that all her little tender ways and kittenish airs had been displayed in vain. So, in sheer pique, she turned them upon the burly squire, who was still brooding over the unfortunate question about his ancestral dwelling-place.

Lucy, left for a moment to himself, turned his eyes upon Mignon. How pleased she seemed to be talking to that

Darkey! and what a young clown that same Darkey was! Quite the very last man in the world whom Lucy would have suspected of taking Mignon's fancy.

He had been used to call her his sweetheart always. Well, he would call her that no more, for she would be somebody's else's sweetheart now. He didn't like the idea of that somebody being Darkey, though; there was something positively revolting about it.

If it had been some decent fellow now, he knew that he would have felt quite different about it; but that he should have to stand on one side and do complacent fogy in favor of Darkey Stanley—Darkey—was simply horrid.

And yet if any one had asked him a month previously what he thought of young Stanley, he would have answered promptly that he was one of the best fellows out; for Darkey had been distinctly a favorite of his ever since he had been in the regiment. He was a handsome boy, and well-born, had a very good property, and was amusing beyond the general run. But when Darkey appeared in the light of a possible—no, hang it all! he told himself, a very probable—husband for Mignon, why, then it became another matter altogether.

Just as he came to that conclusion there was a general rustle among the ladies; and as Mignon rose, still smiling at something Darkey had been saying to her, her eyes met his full, and the smile deepened, and she gave him a little nod. It was just the same smile she had always given him, frank and absolutely familiar — "Just what she would give Bootles," Lucy thought, ruefully.

"*Won't* you get me my fan?" said the piteous little

voice at his elbow. "It's gone under the table." Then as Lucy dived down and brought it to light again—"So good of you. I'm a trouble, I know, but—"

"Why couldn't you ask *me?*" broke in Landover, in a deeply reproachful voice. "Oh, I beg your pardon, Miss Jane, I'm so awfully sorry; did I tear your gown?"

"*Did you tear my gown!*" muttered Jane Carmine, trying to look over her shoulder at the damage. "Oh, don't mention it, Mr. Landover; it's nothing, really, nothing but a stitch or two." But that, of course, was aloud, and in the sweet scrap of voice that had been born for Lucy's benefit.

"My best Redfern gown," she said, angrily, to her sister ten minutes later, when that sympathetic soul had set to work with needle and thread to repair the damage as far as was possible. "And then he asked, 'Did I tear your gown?'—the brute! And I had to look sweet, and be civil over it."

"It *is* vexing. Upon my word, I do think," said Sophy Carmine, trying to gather the frayed strands of satin stuff together, "that when a man makes such a hopeless havoc as this with a gown, he ought at least to give the girl another. It ought to be etiquette."

If they had known that Geoffrey Landover, of Landover Castle, had some fifty thousand a year, and would right willingly have given Jane fifty finer frocks than even her best Redfern gown, it is reasonable to think that their wrath—particularly Sophy's, which was not blinded by a fancy for Major Lucy—would not have run so high.

As it was, when poor Squire Landover appeared in the

drawing-room a little later, snub after snub was showered upon his devoted head, and he went home early, as miserable a man as was ever in love before.

CHAPTER VI.

DRIFTING APART.

To go through life unloving and unloved;
To feel that thirst and hunger of the soul
You can not still; that longing, that wild impulse
And struggle after something you have not and can not have.

LONGFELLOW.

"WHAT are we going to do to-night, Miss Ferrers?" said young Stanley to Mignon a couple of days later, when he came into the large hall in quest of the usual ceremony of afternoon tea.

"Dance," answered Mignon; "just the people who are dining here, and two girls staying with the Brandons, and the girls from the Cottage, and one or two others. Would you like some tea now?" for they were the first comers to the pleasant refection of tea and gossip.

"Yes, please. But tell me—you'll let me have the first, won't you?"

"The first what?—cup of tea? Oh, you greedy boy!"

"No—dance, I meant."

Mignon shook her head. "Not the first, Mr. Stanley; the second, if you like."

"I should like, of course; but really, mayn't I have the first?" imploringly.

"No, not the first. Sugar?"

"Thanks. By the bye, you'll give me the first at the ball, won't you?"

"Cake?" asked the girl, smiling. "There are muffins on that plate."

"Yes—thanks, awfully. But"—anxiously—"about the ball?"

"Time enough—time enough; we will think about it," answered Mignon, who did not see the force of engaging herself so far in advance.

"But won't you *promise* me?" he urged.

"Yes, I promise to think about it," returned the girl, with a gay laugh, which was not what Darkey wanted.

Just then Lucy came in from the vestibule, and held aside the heavy velvet *portière* for Mrs. Ferrers to pass into the hall. She was followed by the five children, who always came down to afternoon tea instead of coming later, as most children do, to dessert.

The young Ferrerses had never taken the same place with Major Lucy as Mignon had done; but with all the passionate warmth of their headlong and headstrong young souls they had, from the first, fallen down and worshiped St. John Stanley. It was natural enough—he was so near to their own age; as near, or even nearer than Lucy had been to Mignon's at the time of her advent into the Scarlet Lancers. And he was of a more jovial disposition than ever Lucy had been; he was ready at almost any time for a race or a rattling romp, or a game of hide-and-seek, or follow-my-leader.

And he sung comic songs—delightful accomplishment!

In a child's mind perhaps only a clown's tricks could rank higher.

He had had his ten minutes alone with Mignon, but he had no more peace after the five youngsters came trooping under the velvet *portière*.

They had just had a bountiful nursery tea, with potted game, jam, and other good things of that kind; so they did not linger round the tea-table, but, after making sure that there were no sweets there, nor even so much as a box of chocolate, they demanded a song.

"But let me finish my tea, won't you?" pleaded Darkey; "I'm so awfully hungry!—you don't know."

"You had a very big lunch, Jack," said Pearl, with severity; "I sat just opposite to you, and so I *know*."

"And you can have some more tea presently," added Maud.

"But the muffins will all be cold," objected Darkey, who was good-nature itself, but naturally preferred to stay by Mignon.

"There'll be plenty of cake," suggested Bertie, who had a tender feeling for the pangs of hunger.

"Well, give him five minutes," said Pearl, relenting a little.

Whereupon they waited, with their four pairs of bright young eyes upon the clock—Baby Madge having fastened her attention upon the big Angora cat as soon as she found herself beside it—and to the very instant carried him off to the neat little piano on the other side of the hall, and demanded the ballad of John with his big boots on, "Sing

along, Sambo,'' and several others. And then they asked for one which they had not heard before.

To meet a demand like this was not easy. Darkey's stock of songs was good, but it was limited; however, after thinking for a minute, he broke into a soft and tender little Christy melody, such as will never be old nor stale while tenderness and pathos are able to sway the very world:

"'Way down upon de Swanee Ribber,
Far, far away,
Dere's whar my heart is turning ebber,
Dere's whar de ole folks stay.
All up and down de whole creation
Sadly I roam,
Still longing for de ole plantation,
And for de ole folks at home.

"All 'round de little farm I wander'd
When I was young,
Den many happy days I squander'd,
Many de songs I sung.
When I was playing wid my brudder,
Happy was I;
Oh! take me to my kind ole mudder,
Dere let me live and die.''

There was staying, with his bright and winsome wife, at Ferrers's Court just then one Scott Laurie, who had been in the Scarlet Lancers with Bootles, and before that had been in the Cuirassiers. He walked into the hall just as Darkey began to sing the quaint little song, and went straight to the piano to listen—to listen while the simple

little air brought back the vivid remembrance of an Indian bungalow, with shaded windows and high white walls—a remembrance of a figure, himself, sitting under the veranda in a big rocking-chair, singing that very song because he was so light of heart at getting out of that land of misery which is called Afghanistan into the comparative coolness and comfort of India; and then Dickson had come out and roughly shaken him up, bidding him remember that a sick man was within hearing.

He turned round to Lucy, who was standing not very far from Mignon.

"Did you ever meet Eliot Cardella?" he asked, abruptly.

Lucy looked surprised. "Oh, yes, I knew him well," he answered. "Why?"

"The very last time I ever heard that"—with a gesture toward Darkey—"was just before Eliot died. I forgot that he was ill until Dickson came out on to the veranda and stopped me. It cuts me like a knife to think about it," he ended, with a sigh.

"Best fellow that ever lived," murmured Lucy.

"And gave his life," rejoined Laurie, fiercely, "for the sake of the falsest Jezebel that ever trod the earth."

"Ah!" murmured Lucy, who had heard the story to which the other alluded.

It would be hard to say what was the influence which moved Lucy then; perhaps it was the bitter regret on Laurie's generally bright and cheerful face, the evidence of the touch between the present and a painful past! But certain is it that at that moment Lucy caught the full gaze

of Mignon's wide-open blue and lovely eyes just as his mind went back over *his* past, and the memory of a girl called Olive, whom he had once loved dearly, came to him.

It was but the flash of a moment, an instant's comparison between the two; but in that instant Lucy realized that his love for Olive had never been his best and strongest, and that the love for the child Mignon had grown and grown and grown until it had taken possession of all his heart and soul.

And he remembered, too, that he was six-and-thirty, and that the light-hearted lad bawling at the piano for the edification of the children was just twenty-one!

It is no wonder that Lucy sighed too. And Scott Laurie liked him better all the rest of his life for it. That is often the way in this world.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RIVER OF YEARS.

Thy love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day,
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun,
And by and by a cloud takes all away.

Two Gentlemen of Verona.

Nature never fram'd a woman's heart
Of prouder stuff—

Much Ado About Nothing.

MAJOR LUCY went up to his room to dress for dinner that night in anything but a happy frame of mind; in anything but the mood which generally possesses a man who

has just discovered that the tender affection of years has developed into the great and passionate love of his life.

Of course he knew that the child was fond of him; she had always been that from the day when he had gone into the pleasant sitting-room of Mrs. Gray's quarters, and had watched that sweet woman dress the baby Mignon in her pretty white furry garments, and then had carried her out into the barrack square for the benefit of all the other fellows, who were filled with curiosity about Bootles's new acquisition; but now he wanted her to be more than fond of him—he wanted, why, he wanted her to love him as he had come to love her.

Only a day or two ago he had told himself that for the sake of her happiness he could and would willingly give her up to any really good fellow in the wide world—except young Darkey Stanley. Now, however, he realized with a great bitter pang that he had nothing whatever against young Darkey excepting the chance that Mignon might love him. No matter who the other man might be, he realized that if he eventually had to give up all idea of winning Mignon for himself, the pang would be just as hard, and the loathing of the other man just as deep.

And he did loathe poor Darkey; there was no doubt about that. Not to the extent of wishing him harm, save as concerned Mignon; not to the extent of being ever likely to do him a bad turn if the opportunity of doing it came in his way. No, his feeling was not of this kind at all; it was simply a loathing. If he saw the lad go near

Mignon it made his flesh creep, exactly as sometimes—pretty often, indeed—Jane Carmine's kittenish tendernesses acted upon him in the same way.

And Darkey was fifteen years younger than himself; that was the worst of it all. Those fifteen years—a very river of years in Lucy's just then prejudiced eyes—weighed upon his mind like a nightmare. Fifteen years! fifteen years! Well, up to the last month Lucy had never felt himself getting old or even middle-aged; he had never felt that he was very much older than Darkey or yet Mignon; he was not bald, no, nor yet even a little thin about the top of his head, and he was neither deaf, nor fat, nor anything but a trifle short of sight (which he had been from a child); but *now* he felt as old as Adam, and almost as wicked! *Now*, fifteen years was an eternity—a great gulf, on one side of which he stood alone, while Darkey and Mignon stood upon the other *together*.

And besides all this, there was Jane Carmine, who would marry him, whether he would or not, if he did not keep a bright look for'ard. Now, even supposing that he had not the ghost of a chance with Mignon, and that Darkey eventually won the day, Lucy had not the smallest intention of being beguiled into the bond of wedlock by Jane Carmine. Indeed, the bare remembrance that such a contingency was possible, and for the matter of that more than probable, if he did not take care, was enough to cut his reflections short, and start him dressing with an alacrity which would have astonished Jane could she have seen him. And then a bright and happy thought flashed into his mind. Why, what an ass he had been, knowing the

house as well as he did, to run night after night into Jane's clutches as he had done!

"The fellows always said I was a fool," he said, ruefully, as he brushed his sunshiny head; "and I must be, never to have thought of the nursery stairs before."

Therefore, when he was ready to go down, instead of creeping along the corridor like a thief in the night, and then flying round the gallery and going down the stairs like an avalanche, he just turned the other way when he left his bedroom—turned the end of the corridor and opened a door on the left which led to a small landing on to which the school-room and nurseries opened. This landing led by a small staircase to the study, library, and the gardens; so Lucy's way down was perfectly easy, and he found himself safe in the drawing-room before Jane Carmine had the slightest suspicion that he had even left his chamber.

He found the room empty. To be sure, Mignon's old favorite, Hugo, was lying in possession of the hearth-rug; but Lucy did not count him any one, although he lifted his handsome head and gave him a contemplative stare with his deep-set eyes; and having satisfied himself that the intruder was friend and not foe, condescended to give three thumps of his heavy tail upon the floor by way of showing that he was welcome.

"Well, old chap," was Lucy's greeting, "waiting for your mistwress—eh?"

Thump—thump went Hugo's tail again, and then, as Lucy did not make any further remarks, he dropped his

heavy head upon his large paws again and went straightway into contemplation.

Then the door opened, and Mignon herself came in—Mignon, in a pretty yellow frock of some soft, sheeny, gauzy material, with a string of pearls round her pretty, slender throat. She shut the door quickly, and came forward with a little skip in her step and such a glad light upon her face that in an instant the *child* came back again, and Lucy's heart leaped up into his throat and nearly choked him.

"Oh, dear Lal, is that you?" she cried. "Why, how early you are! Generally you slip into the room just as the people are going out."

"Yes; but I'm going to be awfully early after to-night," Lucy answered, looking down upon her with quite a new manner, and speaking in quite a new voice.

"That's good. I shall make a point of coming down early too. Go out of the way, Hugo, you selfish old person!" she added to the dog; and then she gave a quick sigh, and said, "I say, Lal, isn't the Court different somehow to what it used to be?"

"Diffewrent?" repeated Lucy, not understanding her meaning exactly.

"Yes," impatiently; "I don't get half the good time I used to do before I went to Paris. I don't think much of being grown-up," with another sigh.

"You used to look forward so to it," Lucy reminded her.

"Yes, I know. But—I don't know how it is—I never seem to have any fun now. I think there are too many

people here. Bootles is always dancing attendance on some one or other; and as for you—"

"And as for me?" repeated Lucy, drawing a step nearer.

"Oh, I never see you— Ah! bother, here's somebody coming. Oh yes, Lal, I know perfectly well that it is not the thing to say 'bother,' but you needn't look so reproachful;" and then she looked round to see who the new comer might be, and seeing, dropped into the nearest chair and began smoothing and pulling Hugo's soft tan-colored ears; and if she tugged a little harder at them than Hugo liked, the old dog bore it without so much as a grunt. Perhaps he knew something of what was going on just then in his young mistress's heart, and felt that it was hard she should never have a word with the man who had been so much to her from the days of her babyhood.

Lucy looked round too, and gave such a groan in the spirit that it was within an ace of a groan in the flesh. If he had not been a scrupulously polite person he could have found it in him to cry out, "Hast thou found me, oh, mine enemy?"—for the new-comer was Jane Carmine.

At that moment—perhaps the only moment when Lucy ever wished for his presence in preference to that of any other person—he would infinitely better like to have seen the dark, close-cropped head and dancing brown eyes of young Darkey Stanley.

But it was Jane; and Jane advanced to the hearth with a beaming face, all unknowing of the fact that Lucy could at that moment have killed her.

"What are you two doing down so early?" she asked. "I thought I should be quite the first."

"You are not generally down so early," said Mignon, stiffly, finding that Lucy did not reply.

"No—but I'm going to turn over a new leaf," Jane Carmine retorted, with a killing look at Lucy, who fairly writhed under it.

Mignon sprung to her feet at once. "Hugo, old fellow, it's time you went off to the hall. You know mother doesn't like you to be in the drawing-room at dinner-time. Come, old boy!"

Hugo needed no further invitation, but rose, stretched himself, and followed the pretty, slender figure in the yellow gown to the door, and when she opened it, paced with slow and stately step out into the hall. Unfortunately for Lucy, when Mignon shut the door she was upon the same side of it as the dog!

If politeness had allowed Lucy to relieve his feelings by a big D just then, it would have been big enough for a wall-poster!

"Fancy you and I to be the first, Major Lucy," Jane remarked, standing very near to him, and resting her arms upon the chimney-shelf in a very free-and-easy fashion. "Usually Mignon and Mr. Stanley are the early birds."

"Is that so?" said Lucy, who had hitherto been so intent upon avoiding Jane Carmine that he had never troubled his head about Darkey's chances with Mignon.

"Yes. There's going to be a little dance this evening—you know about it?"

Lucy made an inward vow that he would *not* ask Jane Carmine to dance, at any rate not beforehand; so he made a little bow, and said, "Oh yes; I heard of it this morning."

"I am not going to dance much," said she, after a pause, finding that he had not apparently thought of asking her to give him a dance. "I don't care about dancing unless my partner is *very* much to my liking."

"I dance vilely," said Lucy, who saw a loop-hole of escape for himself; and if he was not to have as many dances as he had been accustomed to have with Mignon, thought nothing of sacrificing a whole evening in order to save himself the penance of waltzing with Jane Carmine.

"Do you really?" cried Jane, opening her eyes as widely as possible in her astonishment. "Why, I always heard you were a lovely dancer."

"Quite a mistake," murmured Lucy, boldly perjuring himself—and then, joy of joys, the door opened and Mr. Landover came bustling in.

He had not been over at Ferrers's Court since the night when the lady of his admiration had snubbed him so unmercifully. For several days he had mooned and moped about his ancestral halls and stable-yards, cast deep down in the lowest depths of despair. Then he began to think that a girl who was worth winning must be worth wooing; to reflect that if she wasn't like a ripe cherry, just ready to drop into his mouth on the chance of his opening it, why, if he ever did induce her to take that leap, he would be able to comfort himself all his life with the knowledge that if she hadn't been ready and willing to drop into his mouth,

neither had she been ready and willing to drop into any other fellow's.

From this point it did not take Squire Landover very long to determine that he would go over to Ferrers's Court and try his luck again; so, when he received Mrs. Ferrers's invitation to go over to dine and join a little friendly dance, he was but too delighted to avail himself thereof.

All the guests in the house seemed to come in in rapid succession immediately in the wake of the Lord of Landover, and Lucy took the opportunity of slipping out into the hall that he might find out what had become of Mignon.

He found her bending down over the big round table, turning over the leaves of an illustrated paper.

"Why did you desert me just now, Mignon?" he asked, in a very reproachful tone.

"Oh, I wanted to bring Hugo out. Mother does not like him to be in the drawing-room at dinner-time," returned Mignon, in a would-be every-day kind of voice.

"He would have come out without you," said Lucy. "However, as you are here now, I need not grumble at my—" He had been going to say "sweetheart," but he bit the word off his tongue, and rather tamely substituted "at you," trusting that she would not notice it.

But Mignon did notice it, never fear, and of course put down the alteration to quite another motive than the real one.

"Can't you go in to dinner with me?" he asked, without giving her time to answer; "I haven't been accorded that honor for ages. I wish you would."

Mignon was puzzled. She looked up at him with her

searching and limpid eyes, saw that he was evidently quite in earnest, and—"There's mother; let us ask her," she said for answer.

"Major Lucy wants to take you in to dinner, my darling?" she said. "Well, that is very easily arranged;" and she passed on toward the drawing-room, a gracious and lovely woman, leaving peace and joy behind her, and carrying a fair measure of comfort and satisfaction in her train.

"Will you take Miss Jane Carmine in to dinner?" she said to Squire Landover when he came to greet her.

Geoffrey Landover went back to Jane's side in radiant triumph. "I am to take you in to dinner," he announced.

"Delighted, I'm sure," said Jane, biting her lips, and craning to find out what had become of Lucy.

"Where shall we sit?" he asked, when they reached the dining-room.

"Oh, not in the draught; here, this is a very nice place;" and down she plumped into the very next seat to the unfortunate man who at that moment had but one stronger wish in the world than his desire to get rid of her unwelcome attentions.

But Lucy, having got Mignon as his legitimate property for the next hour and a half, was too happy to be dismayed for more than a minute or two. He made a determined effort not to spoil the country squire's chance by pointedly keeping his head turned toward Mignon. Jane Carmine, however, was not a young woman to be cut off in that way, particularly when she had got a new Redfern frock on, as she had that evening; so, finding that Lucy

would not desert Mignon to talk to her, she at once tried to draw Mignon into a conversation.

"I say, Mignon," she said, leaning well across Lucy, "how does Major Lucy dance? Pretty well, eh?"

"He's a perfect dancer," Mignon flashed out, indignantly resentful in a moment of the rather slighting tone.

Jane Carmine's eyes opened wide at this reply, and Lucy felt as if he must collapse utterly; then his serene and mild placidity came to his aid. "*You* think so, Mignon, my sweetheart," he said, gently, "because you have always been lenient to my—er—faults and shortcomings; but Miss Jane would see them with an unprejudiced eye, and think, if she didn't tell me, that I dance vilely."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LORD OF LANDOVER.

He is the bluntest wooer in Christendom.

Henry VI.

An iron will,
With ax-like edge unturnable.

TENNYSON.

AT this point Mr. Landover put in his word. He had been listening in some dismay lest the lady of his love should prove to be engaged for most or all of the dances for that evening.

"I quite had an idea that you were a very decent dancer, Lucy," he said, with the assured air and tone of a man who knew himself to be perfect in that line.

"Quite a mistake," returned Lucy, sweetly. "Not a soul on earth but Miss Ferrers here would say so."

"Ah! Very honest of you to say so, I'm sure. It must be an awful bore to a lady dancing with a fellow who's a muff at it. Miss Jane, I hope you mean to give me the pleasure of the first waltz! I suppose they'll be all waltzes."

"Oh, I should like awfully," said Jane Carmine, who thought it best to make a bold shot and have done with it, "but I'm afraid I'm engaged to Major Lucy here."

Now it happened that, from the time that Mignon had been able to dance at all, it was a standing engagement that she should on all occasions dance the first waltz with Lucy—her devoted Lal—and Jane Carmine's assertion fell like a thunder-bolt upon her. She looked up at Lucy with a gasp; but Lucy, speechless with astonishment, even after *his* experience of the world, had turned in equal surprise to stare at Jane Carmine.

If his had been a nature like Geoffrey Landover's, he would have said bluntly and promptly that she had made a mistake; but if Lucy was anything he was polite, and he could not find it in him to show up a woman before a man who was, he knew, anxious to win her for his wife if he could.

"Don't say anything," he murmured, in an under-tone, to Mignon; "I'll set it stwraight afterward."

"Don't trouble," returned Mignon, sharply; "I'm already engaged for that dance."

Lucy's heart turned fairly sick within him. "What, to young Darkey?" he blurted out.

Mignon nodded; she could not quite bring herself to say

yes, though she was proud enough to feel that if the slave of her baby days wanted more freedom when she was "grown up a young lady," he should have it.

"Of course that wrelieves me fwrom what would have been a vewry awkward necessity," he said, with more than his usual deliberation of speech; "for as I was not engaged to Miss Jane for the dance, nor ever even *thought* of asking her for it, I should have told her of my old standing engagement with you. I couldn't do it before Landover. However, Mignon, as you have been the first to bwreak our old custom, I shall not be under the necessity of making myself disagwreeable—a pwrocess I dislike vewry much; nobody more so."

It was a much longer speech than Lucy was in the habit of making; and although he was raging with fury within, his utterance was sweetly placid, if a little cold, and his manner was so gentle that Mignon quite believed that he did not care in the least. Its end found her, poor child, in the lowest depths of misery, and yet she could not speak out and put everything straight at once. For one thing, Lucy's soft, smooth voice had reached no further than her own ear. Now Mignon knew that she could not sink her voice, which was ringing and very clear, as he was able to do, and perhaps a little feeling of shame at the hastiness of her temper swayed her also. Certain is it that she remained silent when she might have spoken, and that Lucy retained the impression which he had at first received, that, of her own will, she had broken the compact which had lasted ever since she was a little toddling thing scarcely able to reach his arm.

He was brave, this Lucy; for he put the matter on one side like the courteous and polished man of the world he was, and chatted about one thing or other during the rest of the meal as if there was not a shadow in the world to trouble his soul.

But in his pain he had not heart to keep Jane Carmine utterly at bay, and Jane made the very most of her opportunity—flouted Geoffrey Landover more openly than ever, and was tenderness itself to Lucy, who was so miserable that he even found a certain amount of comfort therein.

At last the ordeal was over, and Lucy drew his chair a shade closer to that of his neighbor, Geoffrey Landover, for whom he began to have a fellow-feeling, born of his own doubt and misery.

"I say, Landover," he began, after they had chatted more or less stiffly about the chances of European war and the probable effect of a second Franco-Prussian campaign upon this country, "did you care particularly about that first dance?"

Landover's stiffness all melted at the friendly turn. "Well, to be candid with you, I did," he answered.

"Then, old chap," said Lucy, "I'll not stand in your light. If Miss Jane likes to give me another, well and good; but, to be candid in turn, I don't think she cares a little hang about it."

Geoffrey Landover's face fairly shone with delight, and he put out a huge muscular hand and gripped Lucy's arm until the soldier winced under the pain.

Still he was soldier all over, every inch of him, and he

smiled back into the country squire's eyes as bravely as the red Indian of tradition.

"You're hard hit, then—hey?" he said, with a laugh. "No need to tell me; I saw it long since. Well, I wish you good luck. Go in and win, old chap; I'll not stand in your light."

The squire would have gripped his arm again in the exuberance of his joy; but Lucy saw what was coming, and quietly moved out of the way of such an expression of satisfaction.

"I want to speak to old Bootles. No, don't say a word, old chap," he said, rising; "I understand exactly, as well as if I was in your shoes this minute."

And then he went round to Bootles's chair, thinking, "Poor devil, no need to torture him because that little jade won't see what's good for her."

As soon as he was free to leave the dining-room the "poor devil" went in search of Jane Carmine.

"Miss Jane," he said, in a glad voice, "Major Lucy has been good enough to say he will retire in my favor."

"Retire!" she repeated. "How? I don't understand."

"From the first waltz," the squire explained.

There was a moment's silence; then she asked, in a stifled voice, "Did you ask him for it?"

"No, I didn't, for I never thought he would have been willing to give it up," answered Landover, simply. "He gave it up, or rather offered to give it up, of his own free will. I had no thought of asking such a thing."

For another moment or two there was silence again.

"You'll give it to me now, won't you?" he asked, humbly.

"Oh, yes, to be sure," returned Jane, coldly, then added, in a strictly conventional tone, "I shall be delighted—of course."

It must be owned that the exuberance of Mr. Landover's joy was a little dashed by Jane Carmine's cool reception of Lucy's renunciation; then he remembered the "ripe cherry" theory, and consoled himself by calling her coldness and annoyance maiden modesty! That is not an uncommon thing with men and women who are in love.

In his case, during the time that he had been moping over her rebuffs, he had, when he could not be in his stables, tried the effect upon his perturbed mind of reading poetry. He had come across one little bit which reminded him of Jane Carmine; he had read it a great many times over, partly because it suggested a good reason for her contrariness, thereby giving him much comfort, and partly because it was one of the very few little bits in that particular volume which he could understand:

> "A rose-bud set with little willful thorns,
> And sweet as English air can make her."

So he looked down upon his rose-bud—about whom just then the little willful thorns were a particularly prominent feature—and loved her all the better that she seemed to set so little value upon him. Ah! well, well, so runs the world away! Geoffrey Landover was not satisfied with ripe cherries. When the dancing began, poor Mignon, standing beside young Darkey, had the pleasure of seeing

a very vexed-looking Jane Carmine go off into the giddy throng with the broad-shouldered, loud-voiced lord of Landover Castle, while her devoted slave, Lal, remained quietly talking with the mistress of the house.

"Shall we begin?" said Darkey.

Mignon put her hand out without speaking, and they, too, sailed off across the polished floor; but not for long. Everything seemed out of joint and awkward.

"Let us stop," exclaimed Mignon, who had no notion of dragging out a waltz that did not go. "I am tired, and—and your step does not suit mine somehow. Let us sit out."

Young Darkey cared but little, one way or the other; and as they fell out of the circle of dancers they ran up against Bootles, who looked at them keenly for a moment, then pinched the pink little ear which was nearest to him.

"Why this revolution, little woman?" he asked.

Mignon turned scarlet. "It wasn't my fault, Bootles," she said; and then she looked up at Darkey, who had not the faintest idea what Captain Ferrers meant.

"We are going to sit out," he said. "No, I won't let her get cold, Captain Ferrers; but the fact is"—confidentially—"my step don't seem to suit hers somehow;" and then he drew Mignon away.

Mignon did not go, however, without a backward deprecating glance at Bootles. She would have liked to explain how Lucy had in a measure thrown her over, but that was of course impracticable just then; so she passed on, leaving Bootles thinking, "Oh, that's it, is it? Rather have had Lucy, myself, he's such a dear old chap. But I sup-

pose there *is* a difference in their ages; and after all, the child must settle that matter for herself."

CHAPTER IX.

THE OLD ORDER CHANGES.

Toil on, hope on; for it is sweet—
If not to win—to feel more worthy of her!

LYTTON.

You've grown acquainted with your heart,
And searched what stirr'd it so.
Alas! you found it love.

FLETCHER.

WHEN Bootles parted from Darkey and Mignon he went in search of his wife, whom he found still chatting with Lucy.

"I met the child with young Darkey," he said to his old friend. "The old order changes."

Lucy laughed; and so successful was the effort—oh, heavens! it *was* an effort—that even Bootles, who certainly knew him better than any on this earth, and *thought* he could read him like a book, was deceived into believing that he was indifferent about it.

"The—er—king is dead, my dear chap," he said; "it is the fate of all kings. I've had a—a—long wreign—er—almost a Jubilee; but as you—er—say, 'The old ord-ah changes.' The king is—er—dead: long live the king!"

Bootles laughed long and heartily, as if it was the best joke that had come in his way for years, and Lucy joined

him with as brave a show of hilarity as was in him to display. Bootles never guessed, never suspected that his laughter sounded in his friend's ears like the death-knell of his best and dearest love; never suspected that Lucy's soft laughter was not an expression of mirth but of agony.

But Mrs. Bootles, although she was not generally considered a clever woman, looked up with beautiful, startled eyes, her heart touched as her ear was caught by a bitter ring in the soft voice of her husband's best friend which was utterly new to her.

"The child has not kept up the old custom of the first waltz," she said to herself, "and he feels it. Well, it is only natural."

Meantime young Darkey had sought out a comfortable resting-place in a short passage which led to the gun-room, and also by a side staircase to the upper floor of the house. In this passage, somewhat under the shadow of the stairs, stood an old lounge of the Chesterfield shape, and here Darkey suggested to Mignon that they should sit and rest themselves.

"It's awfully jolly here, Miss Ferrers, don't you know?" he told her; and then as Mignon sat listlessly down, went on: "I'm so sorry my step don't suit yours; I believe I'm not much of a dancer, don't you know?"

"That's very true, Darkey," said she, being too vexed at the general turn of events to disguise her feelings at all; "you can't dance a bit."

"Well, I know I can't. I never had much of a chance of learning, don't you know? A chap hasn't much chance at Eton, and—er—he hasn't any chance at Sandhurst, nor

yet when he gets into the service. But there"—leaning back comfortably, and stretching his long legs well out across the passage—" after all, what's dancing?"

" It is waltzing and so on," replied Mignon, perversely.

" Yes, I know; but"—drawing his legs up, and leaning over on his elbow the better to impress his words upon her—" what is it compared to some other things: hunting, shooting, fishing, fencing, and *fighting?*"

" No," murmured Mignon, remembering that Lucy did all those things excellently well, besides dancing to perfection.

" And even those—what are they," young Darkey continued, " to one's power of loving?"

" Oh, no, no!" cried Mignon, getting frightened all at once.

Young Darkey wriggled a few inches nearer.

" Miss Ferrers—Mignon—I may say ' Mignon,' mayn't I?—I wish you would let me—"

" I think this is my dance, Miss Ferrers," said a voice at that moment.

The voice belonged to a figure which appeared through the gloom of the dimly lighted passage, and bore itself with a distinctly deprecating air, as if it might be intruding upon a very sacred moment, and be anything but welcome.

Young Darkey looked fury and thunder; but Mignon jumped up with such alacrity, and replied in such glad tones, " Oh, Mr. Northlyn, I was wondering if you had forgotten me," that the fury and thunder quickly changed to utter blankness as Mignon's joyous reception of the

new-comer fell upon his ear. And as they disappeared through the curtained door-way leading into the hall, he sat down again upon the sofa with a bump, thrust his hands deep into his pockets, and said a little swear which made quite a new man of him.

"Oh, she was frightened," he said, when he had become this new man. "I startled her; that was it. Women are always like that," this youthful warrior went on to himself as he stretched his long legs out again, and settled himself into a more comfortable position. "However much they want a fellow, their instinct is always to put it off when the final moment comes;" and then he fell to calling Mignon his shy little bird, and many other such terms, and satisfied himself that his way was quite clear, that he had only to take care he did not frighten her—that was all. When he had reached this blissful state of feeling, he upheaved himself from the comfortable old lounge, and went off to join the giddy throng in the more frequented parts of the house.

He was just in time to see Lucy finishing a waltz with Jane Carmine. Lucy was holding her stiffly and at arm's-length, and looked the picture of bored misery, while Jane tenderly clung to him, and had the air of being in Paradise. Young Darkey nearly laughed out aloud as he watched them.

"Lord, how gone she is on the major!" he thought. "Poor soul, she might as well be gone on Bootles himself as on that inveterate old bachelor. I wonder how Landover likes it?"

Landover apparently did not like it at all. He was

standing looking on at the little scene, his face disfigured by the blackest scowl, young Darkey thought, he had ever seen.

But Lucy, who knew that the squire was engaged to Jane Carmine for the next dance, brought that lady up sharp and landed her beside him.

"Ah! Land—ov—ah, is that you?" he remarked, in his most serene and deliberate tones. "The floor is in very good form to-night, is it not?"

"Uncommonly fit," returned Landover, his face brightening visibly as his "rose-bud" drew near. "I think the next dance is ours, Miss Jane, is it not?" he asked, with an air of diffidence which nearly sent young Darkey into a fit.

"Then I may as well resign you to Landover now, Miss Jane," put in Lucy, with alacrity and his blandest air. "I know you'd like Landover to get you some ice or cup or something, wouldn't you?"

Now Jane certainly did not wish anything of the kind; but she could hardly say so, and was in a measure obliged to do just what she did do—that is, bend her head to Landover in token that she accepted his services, grin and look as pleased as was possible under the circumstances, and then—well, she gave Lucy a look as she went away holding Landover by the arm which made him feel for a minute as if he must be the biggest villain unhung.

It was not many seconds before the instinct of self-preservation came to Lucy's aid, and he told himself that he must be neither more nor less than an idiot, as he felt the softening influence fading away.

"Mind, she'll marry you, old chap, if you don't keep a bright lookout," his thoughts ran; "and you don't want to marry her, remember that."

He did not see Mignon anywhere about the ball-room; so, not being particularly interested in any one else, he sauntered out into the hall, where he met her alone, she having just parted from the owner of the voice under pretense of wishing to go upstairs.

Now Mignon was the self-same Mignon who had been the queen of the Scarlet Lancers, and had ruled over her kingdom with a scepter of sweetness and a ball of light. She was not capable of sulking; and to be out of friends with those she loved, even for a moment, made her miserable—so miserable that she was ready to do or say any mortal thing which would bring out the sunshine again.

It was the old Mignon, the dear, tender-hearted child of the days gone by, who ran up to Lucy then and caught his arm.

"Lal, aren't you going to ask me to dance?" she said, reproachfully.

"I did ask—or stay! What was the good of asking you when you told me you had already engaged yourself, Mignon?" he said, gently.

"Only after I thought you *wanted* to dance with Jane Carmine rather than with me," Mignon answered, with deepest reproach in eyes and voice.

"I couldn't help Miss Jane making a mistake, Mignon," said Lucy, who had hard work to keep himself from breaking through all rules of etiquette and taking her to his heart then and there.

"A mistake! And you did not *ask* her?"

"No; I told you so, Mignon," he reminded her.

"Ah! I was too angry to listen," rejoined the girl, frankly. "Well, are you going to dance with me now?"

"Yes, if you care to dance with such an old fogy," said Lucy, smilingly.

Mignon opened her lovely eyes and looked at him with the most intense astonishment.

"An old fogy, Lal!" she repeated; "why, what *are* you dreaming about?"

"Nothing — nothing," returned Lucy, feeling all at once quite a boy again. "There is the music. Shall we go?"

Mignon turned toward the ball-room, which was one of the finest in the county, without a word, and a moment later they were floating along over the polished floor.

Two pairs of jealous eyes were watching them: Jane Carmine's and those which graced young Darkey's head; she, jealous of the different air and exquisite contentment in Lucy's whole bearing; he, driven almost wild by the unutterable happiness on Mignon's fair face.

"Surely the major does not mean to *marry* her," young Darkey thought, in something like despair; "because, if he does, it's all up with me. But, hang it all, he's got such a devilish lot of seniority to her! Besides, it's absurd —and he is not rich or—or—anything but senior. Oh, it's absurd! I dare say Mignon's fond of him—in fact I'm sure she is, dear little pussy-cat; so she ought to be, for he has always been a sort of second father to her; but

as for marrying her, why, it's as absurd as it would be for Bootles himself."

But all the same, he caught himself wishing more than once that Mignon would not look quite so happy. "It's because the major's such a devil of a hand at dancing," the lad told himself. "What a pity my step don't suit hers!"

CHAPTER X.

A STARTLING ANNOUNCEMENT.

A peevish April day—
A little sun; a little rain.

KIRKE WHITE.

A WEEK had gone by. Such a week! Seven mornings, seven afternoons, seven evenings, seven nights—an eternity of feverish hopes and doubts and fears, sighs and smiles and tears!

Seven mornings spent now in sunshine, now in rain; seven afternoons spent chiefly in playing the noble game of cross-purposes; seven evenings spent in a pleasant variety entertainment of violent flirtation, passionate glances, the utterance of tender little speeches breathed into unwilling ears, tempered by icy gentleness, studied politeness, and forced gayety.

In truth, the house-party at Ferrers's Court was not the most pleasant one which had ever been gathered there; and Mrs. Bootles remarked to her husband, with what

looked suspiciously like tears in her sweet eyes, that she could not tell what was amiss with every one.

"Nothing seems to go smoothly now, Algy," she said, piteously, to Bootles at the end of the seventh day.

"Who is it that is wrong?" Bootles asked.

"Well, I don't know, dear; but I think that Mr. Landover wants Jane Carmine, and Jane Carmine seems to have set her heart upon Major Lucy, which is really very stupid of the girl, because Major Lucy will certainly never look at her. It's so silly," she wound up with an aggrieved sigh, "throwing away such a good chance as Geoffrey Landover for a man who won't even look at her if he can help it. And Jane Carmine is not what every man with Geoffrey's position would look at."

"You wouldn't have minded throwing away a good chance in my favor," suggested Bootles, slipping his arm round her waist.

"No, perhaps not; but I should not have made a whole household uncomfortable," Mrs. Bootles declared, vexedly.

"I don't know; you contrived to make this very house, or at least the master of it, uncommonly uncomfortable at one time," cried Bootles, with a jolly laugh. "There, I wouldn't trouble myself about it if I were you, my darling. Depend upon it, it will all dry straight—it will dry straight."

But Mrs. Bootles's face did not clear.

"I don't know what has come to Mignon," she said, doubtfully. "Have you noticed how very much altered the child is?"

"How?" asked Bootles, answering one question by another.

"She is so variable, so hard to please; in fact, I never know what will please her. And she's so—so—capricious—almost, what if one was speaking of any one but sunny Mignon, one might call ill-tempered! I don't know what has come to the child, who used to be the sunshine of the house—everybody's pleasure, everybody's delight! I'm very much afraid, Algy, that that horrid French school has utterly spoiled her; and"—with a little sob—"I'm really so unhappy about it I don't know what to do."

"It will all dry straight; don't worry yourself, my darling," Bootles murmured. "The child is a child still, though she has attained the wish of years and 'grown up a young lady;' and I fancy young Darkey's adoration rather bothers her. It seems to me that she's divided between that and her desire not to have old Lal shoved into the background: it's natural, quite natural, for she was always devoted to him; and—er—in fact, I had an idea that everything would be very different, only this young Darkey coming along seems to have upset everything. But there, my darling, we must let the young folk settle these little details for themselves. Don't you worry about it; depend upon it, it will all dry straight."

It was, however, but a momentary comfort that Mrs. Bootles derived from these remarks; for with the following day it became painfully evident to her that, to all outward appearances, the "drying straight" process was as far off as the millennium. Instead of getting better the state of affairs decidedly got worse. Jane Carmine flouted

the squire of Landover more openly and more unkindly than she had ever done before, and on his side the squire seemed to find the little willful thorns surrounding his rose-bed much more prominent than the charms of the floweret; the lad Darkey had become so desperate, that to put himself out of his misery he would right willingly and gladly have dared all and risked all; only Mignon never gave him the very smallest chance of speaking out except when Major Lucy happened to be present, at which time she was always willing to laugh and talk with him in apparently the most friendly way possible. But the sight of Lucy's serene face proved to be too much for young Darkey's self-possession; and somehow, at such times, he was never able to get the all-important words out.

As for Mignon, as her mother had very truly said to Bootles, she seemed to be utterly altered, and not for the better.

A decided coolness had sprung up between herself and Lucy, exactly how and why either of them would have found it hard to say; to a certain extent it is immaterial. A coolness had sprung up between them; and although Lucy's serenity and gentleness of manner remained outwardly unruffled, all the old doubts and fears had come back in full force. The river of years which divided him from Mignon (*and* Darkey) had grown so wide and broad and strong that it seemed to him as if no bridge could ever be built to span it.

But Mignon made not the smallest attempt to build any such a bridge. She had taken to calling him *Major Lucy!* and however much she moped and pined for the

good old days in private, she certainly was very successful in hiding her feelings from the friend of her childhood. When he was to the front she just went in for young Darkey with an artless, childish air which made Lucy think that the engagement was but a work of time, and sent *his* hopes down to zero, if it did not extinguish them altogether. And then, by way of relieving her agony, she one evening when there was a small and informal dance at the Court, changed her tactics, and set out all her charms for the delectation of Geoffrey Landover—not a little to Jane Carmine's amazement, and, I may add, unmitigated disgust, and a very great deal to that gentleman's surprise and complaisance.

"Jane," whispered Sophia, sharply, to her sister, whom she made no secret of thinking the biggest fool to be found in the wide world, "Mignon Ferrers has danced three times with Mr. Landover, and you'll lose him altogether if you don't mind. How can you be so silly as to let a little chit, a boarding-school miss like that, take him away from under your very nose?"

"Oh, he'll never look at Mignon," returned Jane, with an air of security, though she had no such feeling in her heart. "I say, Sophy, why don't you go in for him yourself? I wish you would."

"I would if it could be of the slightest use," Sophy replied, promptly; "but, as you know well enough, he has never cast so much as a glance at me; so what's the good?"

Poor ill-used Geoffrey Landover was so astonished at Mignon's new departure that his spirits went up as high as

Lucy's had gone down, and he gave himself up to the enjoyment of the moment with an alacrity and a power of making the most of a good time, such as drew down half a dozen sharp and searching glances from Jane upon them, and presently brought her across the room with a resolute air of being determined to stand no nonsense.

She very quickly contrived to take Landover away from Mignon; for although she did not want him herself, and would infinitely prefer to marry Lucy, yet she was not inclined to see Mignon the mistress of Landover Castle while she was yet simple Jane Carmine, mistress of nothing at all.

Mignon's discovery that she could make that particular bear dance almost at will, did not tend to smooth over the undeniably ruffled plumage of the circle at the Court just then. She played upon that string a good deal—not out of any malice, poor child, or from any wish to hurt the tender feelings of others, but because to go and flirt (it really was flirting, pure and simple, for she meant nothing by it) with Geoffrey Landover took her away from the tediousness of staving off young Darkey's ardor, and also roused Jane Carmine up to a sense of her duty.

But although Mignon's meaning was innocent enough, the effect was most disastrous to the success of Mrs. Ferrers's house-party; the domestic horizon grew more and more clouded and sullen, Mrs. Bootles got more frightened and uneasy (indeed, one might have imagined that she expected bloodshed—a meeting with rapiers out in the park, or the discovery of Jane Carmine with her throat cut from ear to ear, and the open window of her

bedroom showing which way the murderer had flown after wreaking his vengeful jealousy upon her), and Bootles himself—only restrained from speaking out and trying to bring the various lovers to a reasonable understanding by his wife's piteous entreaties that he would not interfere—more than once announced his intention of taking a trip to Monte Carlo, just by way of getting into a fresh atmosphere.

"Do, dear Algy, darling, not interfere," she cried, in her most coaxing accents. "You don't know *what* harm it might do. It will all—all—you know as you said, dear—it will all—*dry straight.*"

And so the winter days went on until the time of Lucy's leave had almost expired, and also that of St. John Stanley; there were, in fact, only six days left to them. By this time the house was filled to overflowing; for the much-talked-of ball, which would formally introduce Mignon into society, had been fixed to take place on the second of those last six nights.

The presence of a large number of guests was a great relief to everybody, even to Jane Carmine herself, who with Sophy would terminate her long visit on the third day after the ball.

It happened that toward the close of the afternoon of the day before the ball Lucy said to his hostess, "Mrs. Bootles, I've got to write a letter of importance; if I go into Bootles's den I shall be out of evewrybody's way."

"Yes, do; and nobody will disturb you at all," returned Mrs. Bootles, kindly.

So Lucy betook himself off, passed through the library,

where half a dozen people were writing letters, and shut himself up in his old friend's little den, where he sat down and steadily waded through a lawyer's letter, and then wrote an answer thereto.

"I think I'll have a pipe now," said he to himself, as he stuck the stamp on the envelope.

He looked at his watch; it was just a quarter to five—plenty of time for a pipe before tea would be going in the hall.

He pulled a big chair up to the fire and established himself therein, filled his pet pipe—one which had been well seasoned without being too strong — and having set it agoing gave himself up to the dreamy pleasure of contemplation. Naturally his thoughts reverted to Mignon. How charming she had looked when she came in to lunch that day, having just returned from a brisk walk across the park, her fair silky hair all blown about by the wind, and her round young cheeks crimsoned by the sharp exercise! But by and bye he had noticed that the warm blood faded out of her cheeks, leaving them perfectly white, and then the round young face began to look very wan, and dark lines came out under the eyes; and once he had caught her soft eyes turned full upon him, and felt his heart throb as—as only Mignon had ever been able to make it. But a minute afterward she had spoken to him about some trivial every-day matter, and call him *Major Lucy!* Poor Lucy! He gave a great sigh at the very thought of it. *Major Lucy!*

But now thinking over it all, he remembered that he had not noticed young Darkey's having spoken to Mignon

during the whole of the meal, although he was only separated from her by one person. Had they quarreled, he wondered? Had young Darkey gone into a huff about something? and was he making the child miserable with his confounded airs and graces? Devil take the young fool! he had a right good mind to punch his head for him; and then his thoughts were put to flight by the sound of an imperative knock upon the door.

"Da-da," cried a little voice on the other side, "ope-door. Mat wamp tum in."

Lucy knew the formula, "Mat wamp tum in," which meant that little Madge was without and demanded entrance. So he got up and opened the door, that the imperious little roly-poly might come in.

She looked round with an air of dignity.

"Wamp da-da now," she said, in a threatening tone.

"Da-da's out," Lucy explained, blandly.

Madge looked round again, pointed to a box of chocolates which stood on the mantel-shelf, and issued a command.

"Wamp sweets now."

Lucy lifted her upon his knee and let her help herself; and so they sat contentedly for some minutes—he holding her fast, she with a little velvet-soft arm around his neck, munching blissfully at the bonbons.

All at once she pushed the box away, and stroked his face with the other little soft hand.

"De—ar Loo—ty," she murmured.

"How like Mignon you are, child," cried Lucy, hugging her close to him.

Madge looked up at him with solemn eyes full of a new idea: "Mignon," she said, in a tone of positive assertion, "tiss—Jack."

CHAPTER XI.

"MIGNON—TISS—JACK!"

A truer, nobler, trustier heart,
More loving or more loyal, never beat
Within a human breast.

BYRON.

An unlesson'd girl, unschool'd, unpractis'd:
Happy in this, she is not yet so old
But she may learn; happier than this,
She is not bred so dull but she can learn;
Happiest of all is, that her gentle spirit
Commits itself to yours to be directed.

Merchant of Venice.

"MIGNON," said little Madge, in a tone of positive assertion, "tiss—Jack!" and finding that Lucy had nothing to say about it, repeated it again and again and again, until it passed into a kind of chant.

"Mignon—tiss—Jack!
Tiss—Jack—tiss Jack!
TISS—JACK!"

Like all very little children, she was inordinately proud of having acquired a new phrase, and said it over and over, until it became sing-song, and the childish brain a trifle mixed. She said it, too, until Lucy was nearly mad.

At first the words had set his heart beating violently, as hearts do throb and flutter at bad news; then it calmed down to a dull, dead aching, and the black blankness of utter despair settled down upon him and took complete possession of him.

Mechanically he took off the lid of the bonbon box when the child demanded, "wamp more sweets now;" and as mechanically opened the door, and then that of the library, when she by and by issued another imperious command:

"Mat wamp mum-ma now; Mat wamp tea."

But when he had seen the little mite safely into the hall where he could hear, by Mrs. Bootles's soft laugh, the mistress of the house was sitting, he went back into his friend's little den, and shut himself in with his new trouble alone.

It had fallen at last—the blow which he had been dreading so many weary, weary days. It was all over; Mignon had passed out of his life, and he would be nothing more to her now than "a sort of father."

It was natural enough. St. John Stanley was young, rich, well-born, a handsome lad, and a good lad, too, in his way, with a taking manner, even if he had the devil's own temper behind those blazing black eyes of his. It was natural enough; for he was young, and Lucy felt so old—so old!

He filled his pipe again as mechanically as he had taken the lid of Madge's goody-box; he even lighted it, and began to smoke furiously. But it did not last; after a few minutes the red glow waxed duller and duller, and presently it went out altogether.

Still he sat there staring into the fire, just for all the world as Bootles had sat twelve years before, when Miss Grace had said positively that she could not marry him.

But it was very different in reality. Captain Ferrers had known that the woman he loved cared for him; he had seen it in every look and gesture, heard it in every word that fell from her lips. Lucy had no such consolation; on the contrary, the little child's innocent words had sounded in his ears like the death-knell of all his hopes, the death-knell of his love. Mignon had given herself to his rival; and here Lucy laughed out aloud at the idea of young Darkey, with his few months of service, standing in such a relation to him. Well, well, as he had said not long ago to Bootles, the old order changes: "The king is dead; long live the king!"

He sat there, holding his neglected pipe between his fingers, for a long time; the blazing fire became one bright red heart, then grew dull, and slipping down in the grate, became no more than a handful of live cinders. Still he sat on, until by and by the door burst open, and handsome Pearl appeared upon the threshold.

"Oh, Major Lucy," she began, "mother wants to know if you have finished your letters?"

"Yes, Pearl, I have finished," he said, quietly.

"Then won't you come to tea? Mother has just had a fresh lot in—and some fresh muffins. Do, Major Lucy."

He roused himself at once. "I will come. I believe I was half asleep," he answered.

The Ferrers children were one and all exceedingly fond of him, though they had never been on the same footing

of absolute familiarity with him as Mignon had been; but Pearl knew him well enough to slip her hand under his arm, and gabble on about her pony and some wonderful sharpness he had shown that afternoon, as they passed through the library to the hall. For the first time in his life Lucy was devoutly thankful that Mrs. Ferrers had never allowed her younger children to address him as "Lal;" for now that Mignon had abandoned the pleasant habit, it would have been unbearable to have it taken up by the five youngsters of the family. No, Mignon had given it up of her own free will, and no other should ever call him so. Of that he was determined.

Mrs. Ferrers looked up with a smile as he drew near her table. "Have you got through your letters?" she asked, in her pleasant and friendly tones.

"Yes—thanks," returned Lucy, smiling also—"terwrible bore lawyers' letters are."

"There was only *one*," remarked Pearl, in a very clear and distinct voice, "and it wasn't a thick one at all."

"But it took a lot of thinking out," returned Lucy, promptly; for if he had broken his heart, he had not lost his wits by any means.

Mrs. Ferrers laughed good-naturedly. "Pearl has yet to fathom the mysteries of lawyers' letters," she said, as she handed to Lucy the cup of tea which she had just poured out.

"Happy Pearl," murmured Lucy, with his wisest air.

He looked round for Mignon then, and found her sitting in the middle of a group of gay young people who were

chattering like a flock of magpies; but St. John Stanley was not one of them, nor was he in the hall at all.

"Waiting about to get hold of Bootles and get everything settled," said Lucy to himself.

But if that was so, young Darkey was not able to carry out his design; for a few minutes later Bootles, followed by one or two other men, came in clad in pink, and clamoring loudly for tea. Lucy was one of the most generous men living; there was not a shade of meanness in his character; but it must be owned that he felt a certain thrill of satisfaction that everything had not fallen out exactly as this young Alexander had planned.

When Bootles had kissed his wife and had got his tea, he nudged Lucy, that he might attract his attention.

"I say, old fellow," he whispered, "the fair Jane's time is getting short now, so she's giving Landover a few crumbs of comfort to console him."

"I wish she'd give him the whole loaf," replied Lucy.

"You ungrateful beggar!" laughed Bootles, with another nudge.

"Yes, I know, but I hate wrye bwread," said Lucy, plaintively.

Bootles positively roared. "Well, I must put a stop to their billing and cooing," he laughed, "for Landover's got to dress in my room, and I shall take an extra long time to-night."

"Pwray don't!" cried Lucy, in alarm, "or at least let me clear out first. It wants an age to dwressing-time yet, and—and—pwray let me clear out first;" for during the last week or two, when Mr. Landover had been at the

Court for any afternoon festivity, and was remaining for the evening, he had brought his things over and dressed there; and since the house had been so unusually full, as it had been for several days past, he had dressed in Bootles's dressing-room a little earlier than usual.

In dread that if Mr. Landover was sent off to dress, Jane Carmine would certainly get hold of him and keep him talking to her for half an hour (an infliction which, just then, Lucy felt he simply could not stand), Lucy went off to his own room long before the dressing-bell rang. Up to that time young Darkey had not appeared, and Lucy wondered if he had rushed off to the nearest town to buy an engagement-ring or some offering of that kind.

He stopped every now and then to think how lovely Mignon had looked. How— But there, what was the good of thinking about her? He had loved her better than she had ever loved him, and he must learn to do without her, and the sooner the better.

He wondered, though, whether she and Darkey would stay in the Scarlet Lancers now. If they did, it was very certain that he would have to go. His self-possession was one of his best gifts; it was out of the common good, better than most men's, but it was not equal to that. And he felt that it would be hard if he was driven out of his old regiment, even if it was by Mignon.

He did not dawdle about his room after he was dressed, but went down, as usual, by way of the little stair leading to Bootles's den. Strangely enough, Jane Carmine had never discovered the secret of that stair—perhaps because very few guests at the Court were made free of the den.

True, she had once or twice been down early and had captured him in the drawing-room; but then Lucy had conceived the idea of putting in the few minutes in the den itself, and Jane, having watched and waited about in vain, was fairly bamboozled.

This evening Lucy believed that he was much earlier than he was; but he went down as soon as he was ready, for one reason because he was restless, and could not stay quietly anywhere. He reached the den in safety, and to his surprise, when he pushed the door open, found Mignon sitting at the table, an open letter before her, and resting her head upon her hand.

She was still in her day-dress, and when she looked up he saw that there were tears upon her cheeks.

"I—I—beg your pardon, Mignon," he said, rather awkwardly, and preparing to retreat; "I did not know any one was here."

But Mignon sprung hastily to her feet.

"Why need you run away because *I* am here, Lal?" she said, in a tone of deep reproach. "Any one would think I was a leper."

Something in her tone, something in her face all at once made Lucy draw nearer to her, hope springing high once more, and such a wild joy throbbing in his heart that he could hardly force himself to speak; but all the same he did manage to speak, and to the point.

"Mignon," he said, breathlessly, "what do you mean? Is it twrue what little Madge told me this afternoon—that you and young Darkey are—" he had been about to say "engaged," but Mignon cast a glance of such unmitigated

scorn and contempt upon him that the word literally froze upon his lips; and then she hid her face upon her hands, and broke into a storm of passionate sobs and tears, in the midst of which a solemn footman, all plush and powder, opened the door gently and said, in a perfectly unmoved voice, as if violent storms of weeping were the most every-day occurrences possible, "Dinner is served, sir, and Mrs. Ferrers wished me to say that all the company is assembled."

"Wait a minute," said Lucy, catching up a pencil and paper, and scrawling upon it,

"Something has upset Mignon; she can't come to dinner. I'll stop with her. DON'T say a word to a soul; I'll slip in presently."

He twice scored a line under the word "don't," and twisting the note up, told the servant to hand it to Mrs. Ferrers without making any more display of it than was possible; and then when the fellow had departed he turned back to Mignon and laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"What does it all mean, my sweetheart?" he asked, tenderly. "What is all this that has come between us lately—you and I, who used to be so much to one another?"

"It's being grown up," Mignon broke out. "I hate being grown up. I hate it! You've *never* been the same to me since, and—and people say things now they wouldn't have dared to say when I was little; even *that* Darkey says—" and here her sobs choked her once more.

"What has he been saying?" demanded Lucy, peremptorily.

"He says he'll blow his brains out if I won't promise to marry him—*him*," she repeated, with withering contempt.

It must be admitted that at this point Lucy went off into fits of laughter; ay, serene and quiet Lucy laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks.

As for Mignon, she sat up and regarded him with solemn and reproachful eyes. "I can't see anything to laugh at," she said, with dignity.

"My sweetheart," said Lucy, smiling still, "it is good to laugh sometimes; I have not laughed for weeks. *Don't* say that you hate to be gwrown up; it is lovely to be gwrown up, if evewrything else goes all wright."

"But everything has gone wrong," cried Mignon, her eyes filling with tears once more.

"But, sweetheart, evewrything will go wright if only you will tell me one thing," he cried; "if only you will tell me that you think you are quite old enough to be marwried now."

"To Darkey!" exclaimed Mignon.

Lucy caught her in his arms—"No, not to Darkey, my sweetheart; but if you think your old Lal is not too old, and too fatherly, and—" And then—well, to be candid, I don't know how it was, but Mignon gave a smothered little cry, and in its birth young Darkey's chance died.

CHAPTER XII.

MIGNON'S HUSBAND.

Very fair—in the glory of her youth;
Golden-haired and perfect-featured; sunshine from her face;
On her lips a strength of purpose; in her eyes a depth of truth;
Nothing mean and nothing selfish in her noble heart—
Womanhood her grandeur; her simplicity is grace.

HOWITT.

FOR the space of half an hour—one of those delicious golden hours which come to us now and again during the course of life's fitful fever—Lucy and his sweetheart sat together in Bootles's dingy little den telling their love; then Lucy remembered that Mignon had eaten very little lunch that day, and also that she must show in the drawing-room a while later.

"You must go to dwress, my darling," he said; "I will get hold of one of the servants and send some dinner up to your wroom. And Mrs. Bootles will be uneasy; she thinks you are ill all this time. But first tell me—how came little Madge to tell me such a tale of you?"

"What did she tell you? Why, Lal dear, that mite is not capable of telling you anything," Mignon cried.

"Oh, but she is; she told me solemnly, and with evident understanding, 'Mignon tiss—*Jack!*'"

Mignon laughed out loud; such a gay and joyous peal of mirth as had not passed her lips since she had come home from "that horrid French school, which had utterly

spoiled her." "Oh, what a joke!" Fancy, in the short space of half an hour, the very sentence which had caused Lucy the most intense agony had come to be "a joke!" That is the world all over. "It is Madge's last long sentence. Mary, you know, is the under-nurse, and Mary is spoons with one of the keepers, who is called 'Jack.' A day or two ago she must have seen Mary and Jack—er—spooning, you know, for she has been saying, 'Maimie tiss Jack' all day long. I dare say she got a little mixed when she gave you *my* name instead of Mary's; but—but—it wasn't me, Lal, I'll give you my word for that."

He saw her safely up the little stair, and then went off to find a friendly servant who would send up some sort of dinner to Miss Ferrers's room; and having done this, he quietly went into the dining-room and slipped into a vacant place beside Mrs. Ferrers, regardless of the fact that Jane Carmine was on the other side of it.

Mrs. Ferrers looked up anxiously. "What is wrong with the child?" she whispered; then caught the expression of blissful happiness upon his face, and said, "Major Lucy—Cecil—what is it?"

"Nothing; I'll tell you afterward. Mignon is all wright now. She has gone up to dwress, and I told one of the men to send some dinner up to her. That was wright, wasn't it?"

"Quite right. Your note made me so uneasy, but I didn't say a word to any one."

"Thanks, many, for that," murmured Lucy, gratefully.

Her attention was called away then, and Lucy devoted

his to his dinner, turning, however, very gallantly to Jane Carmine when she addressed him in her meekest, most feminine, and plaintive voice.

"Has anything happened to Mignon, Major Lucy?" she asked, with an air of extreme anxiety.

"She was prevented from coming to dinner, that was all, Miss Jane," he answered, leaning back in his chair, and looking at her with eyes so filled with love that poor Jane was fairly dazzled.

Young Darkey noticed the alteration in the major's manner too, and knew, poor lad, by the quick, true instinct of love, that an explanation had taken place, that the major had won the day, and that all hope for him was over. He was a brave lad, although he had made that foolish threat to Mignon about blowing his brains out; and he did not wait to learn the worst in the ordinary way. As soon as the ladies had left the room he swaggered round the table and took a chair next to the major.

"Have you anything to tell me, major?" he asked, bluntly.

Lucy looked at him, wishing to spare him pain and break it gently.

"Is it all up?" he asked, huskily.

"I'm afwraid so, Darkey," said Lucy, simply.

He sat perfectly still for a moment, as if the verdict was too much for him. "I'm off to-night, major; do you mind saying 'good-bye' to Ferrers and his wife—and—and Mignon?"

"You'll do nothing wrash?" asked Lucy.

"Oh, no; whatever I am, I'm not a coward. But I shall get out of the Scarlet Lancers as soon as I can."

"I'm awfully sorwry for you, dear lad," murmured Lucy, pitifully.

"Yes, it was no use—I knew it all along; but you gave me a fair chance, major, and I'll not forget it. Good-bye."

He disappeared then, and Lucy went up to Bootles's end of the table, the men having already begun to move toward the hall, for they seldom sat more than ten minutes after the flight of the ladies.

"Bootles," he said, "come into the den with me before you go into the dwrawing-wroom; I've got something to tell you."

"All right, old chap," Bootles answered; "I'll come now."

But when they reached the den he turned round and gripped hold of his old friend's hand—gripped it hard.

"You needn't tell me, old fellow, for I know," he said, gladly—"one glance at your face told me what had happened. I needn't tell you that I'm glad, Lucy; you know it has always been the wish of my heart. God bless you, old fellow! the child chose a treasure when she chose you."

* * * * * * *

An hour later Geoffrey Landover and Jane Carmine sat on the old sofa in the narrow passage leading to the gun-room.

"I had no idea," Mr. Landover was saying, "that Lucy was thinking about Ferrers's little daughter."

"Oh, *I* had," said Jane, with a little air of being behind the scenes and knowing all about it; "but then, of course, it was a secret, and I couldn't *say* anything about it."

"No, of course not—of course not. Well, I wish them joy, every joy; only wish I was going to follow his example; but—but what lady would look at a great hulking clod like me?" and he really believed what he said.

"I don't see why she shouldn't," murmured Jane, coquettishly. She was determined that Mignon, although she had won Major Lucy, should not crow over her as an engaged young lady.

Mr. Landover edged a trifle nearer, making the old lounge groan and creak beneath his substantial weight.

"Jane," he began, desperately, "I'm a plain man, I know, but I'm very well off, and I've got the finest place in the county—this ain't a patch upon it—and you might do just as you like in every way—trample me in the dirt under your feet if you like, and have a new frock every day in the year. Oh, Jane, only say you will—by Jove, you'll make me the proudest and happiest fellow in England!"

"There's only one thing," sighed Jane, with a demure smile and a downcast look.

"Yes—and that?" eagerly.

"Well, I must say I should like my husband just to love me a little bit," whispered Jane, very softly.

And after awhile they went back to the world troth-plighted! Oh, Jane Carmine, Jane Carmine! that fancy of yours for Major Lucy did wonders for you. Instead of

leaving you to wither on the virgin thorn, it transformed you into

"A rose-bud set with little willful thorns,'"

and between the two there is a difference as great as the poles are far asunder!

But somehow, try as he will, Major Lucy can not make his sweetheart Mignon see it in that light at all!

"I don't like Jane Carmine," she always says, "and Jane Carmine hates me;" and Lucy knows perfectly well that Mignon is right.

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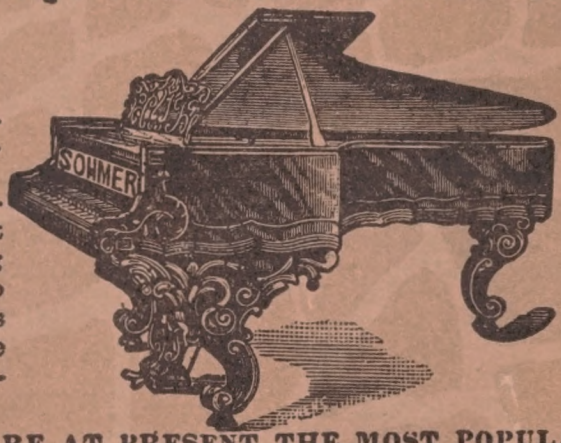

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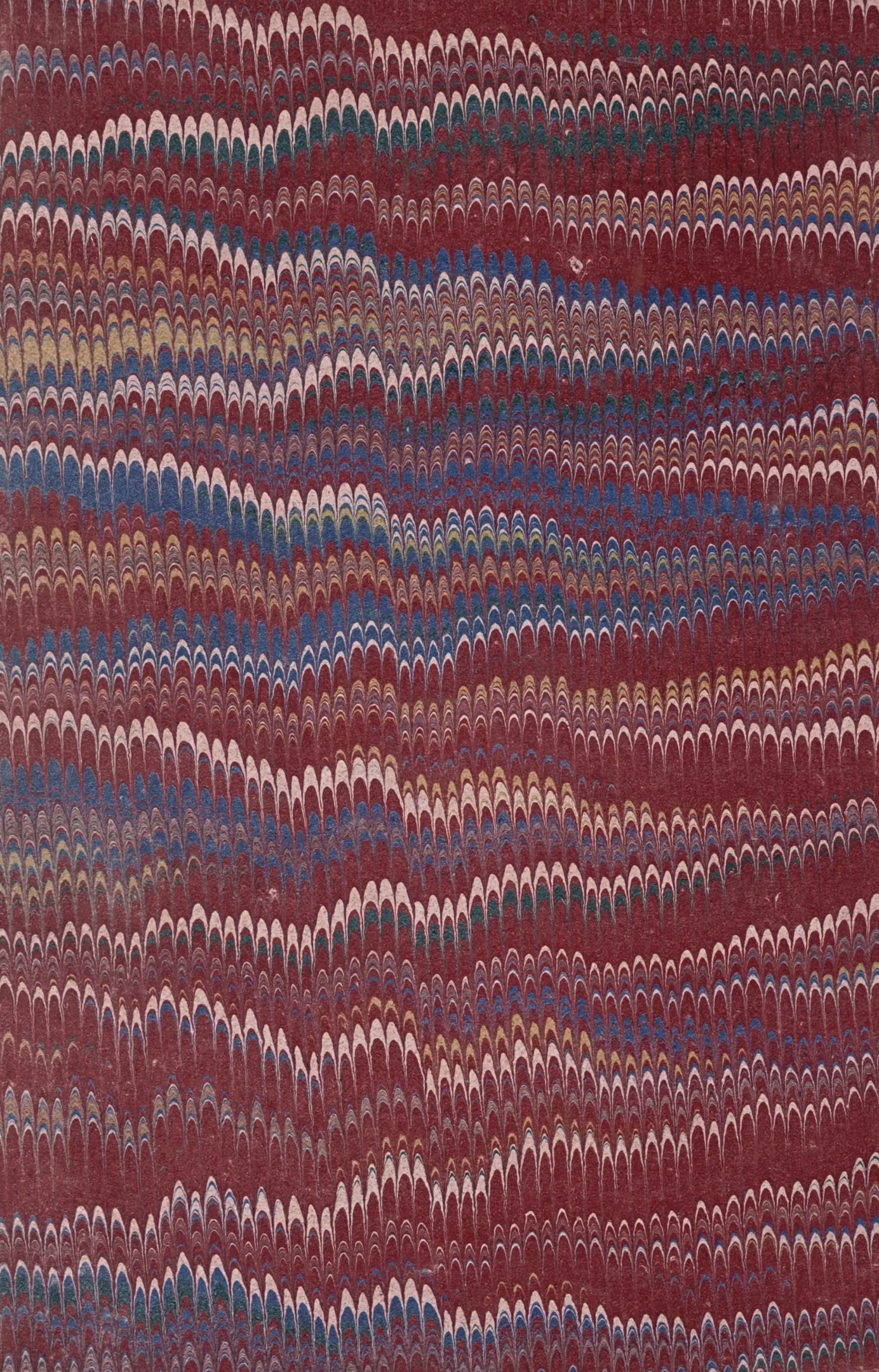

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